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The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty:
Antonin Artaud and Corpus Christi Drama

by

Leanne Michelle Groeneveld ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of English

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Abstract

The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty: Antonin Artaud and Corpus Christi Drama

Critics conventionally regard medieval drama as a theatre of the incarnate Word; twentieth-century theorist and playwright Antonin Artaud considered it instead to be a theatre of the word Incarnate, envisaging a future drama of "cruelty" with similar emphasis on the flesh. Both readings acknowledge, however differently, that theatre is a peculiar type of representation operating through bodies subject to disease, death, and decay.

Chapter one discusses plague, heresy, and theatre, and their nature as "doubles" of mundane reality, as conceptualized both in Artaud's theories and in medieval popular and ecclesiastical religion; the medieval Christian's abjection as speaking subject is discussed, as is his or her identity as mere performance or imitation of Christ. Chapter two takes up the problem of language, described in similar terms by both Artaud and medieval theologians, in relation to English biblical drama; the separation of body and spirit, of word and thought, is traced from humanity's Fall to the Incarnation of Christ and, finally, to the Advent of Antichrist. Chapter three outlines a number of strategies used by those in opposition to God and the Word, such as King Herod at the Slaughter of the Innocents and Christ's trial, and the Jewish/Lollard skeptic in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. Chapter four then goes on to discuss God's response to this skepticism and its paradoxical resemblance to the rejection (or deconstruction) of faith it addresses. Finally, chapter five explores the problem of sustaining Christ's "law" of revolution and incompletion, while the conclusion examines the implications for humanity and for God of the end of time and its attendant plague. The post-resurrection body of gold and crystal, like Artaud's desired "body without organs," seems to offer the individual the hope of future completion and therefore freedom from God. However, because resurrected bodies will retain individual characteristics, including marks of faith signifying virginity or martyrdom, they will

preserve plague or liminality. The Christian individual then both takes on the body without organs and permanently retains its nemesis: the penetrable and therefore tyrannized body of flesh.

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Introduction

In her book *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, Jane Goodall categorizes and critiques post-structuralist appropriations of Antonin Artaud the poet, patient, and theorist. She identifies in the literature two distinct and equally mythical "Artauds": one hailed by the gurus of counter-culture "as the prophet of a theatre at once lost and yet to come, where holy and violent passions were to be unleashed," the other eagerly analysed by French critical theorists and philosophers who proclaimed him "one of the principal modern challengers to 'the subject' and to knowledges predicated upon it" (1, 2). The single most important characteristic of both of these Artauds was without doubt his 'madness':

> In the case of the first, madness was the authority by which he violated social and cultural limitations to offer the revelation of immediate experience. In the case of the second, it was madness (sometimes more specifically schizophrenia) that, having fractured the constituted subject, opened the way to ideas of subjectivity as multiple or heterogeneous, as *en procès*. (2)

In both readings, Artaud's madness divided him from society and, more importantly, from himself. While critics acknowledged the pain this separation must have caused him, they almost uniformly concluded that the advantages he derived from his madness more than outweighed any disadvantages or hardships he might have incurred or endured. It was therefore decided by members of both camps that Artaud's insanity had affected not so much a division from society as a *liberation* from society and from the self.[1] Not surprisingly, Goodall considers this larger reading to be overly simplistic, offensively patronizing, and, still worse, ultimately silencing.[2]

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[1] Jerzy Grotowski, disciple of the first "Artaud," writes the following of his mentor's sickness in *Towards a Poor Theatre*:

> He couldn't bridge the deep gulf between the zone of visions (intuitions) and his conscious mind, for he had given up everything orderly, and made no attempt to achieve precision or mastery of things. Instead he made his chaos and his self-division objective. His chaos was an authentic image of the world. It wasn't a therapy but a diagnosis, at least in the eyes of other people. His chaotic outbursts were holy, for they enabled others to reach self-knowledge. (123-24)

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, analysts of the second Artaud, are still more explicit and enthusiastic about the liberating potential of their analysand's particular brand of insanity -- schizophrenia. They write in *Anti-Oedipus*:

> *Artaud makes a shambles of psychiatry, precisely because he is schizophrenic and not because he is not.* Artaud is the fulfillment of literature, precisely because he is

"Madness" was not, of course, the only personal characteristic that made and makes Artaud the ideal subject for modern critics and clinicians alike. He suffered, in addition, an addiction to opium; experienced strange hallucinations or "visions;" was of ambiguous sexuality; and felt himself drawn to the idea of secret cabbalistic societies as well as to Hitler's Nazi Germany. Artaud was an addict, a mystic, an effeminate, a heretic, a sadist, an anarchist, and a fascist all rolled into one, and thus could serve any number of post-structuralist causes quite effectively. However, he was also a self-proclaimed throw-back; his vision of future cruelty was only post-structuralist via a return to the distant past. Artaud's mission was to restore to the modern theatre an authenticity he felt was somehow lacking; he believed that the way to do this was to model his own theatre of cruelty on "ancient" Occidental or on so-called "primitive" or "primordial" Oriental theatres. In his "Manifesto for a Theater that Failed," he writes:

> the Revolution most urgently needed consists of a kind of regression into time. Let us return to the mentality or even simply to the way of life of the Middle Ages, but really and by a kind of essential metamorphosis, and then I shall consider that we have accomplished the only revolution worth talking about. (trans. Weaver 162)[3]

> schizophrenic and not because he is not. It has been a long time since he broke down the wall of the signifier: Artaud the Schizo. From the depths of his suffering and his glory, he has the right to denounce what society makes of the psychotic in the process of decoding the flows of desire. (135)

[2] She offers a rather scathing critique of Derrida's "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation" and "La parole soufflée," two articles from *Writing and Difference*:

> Artaud's challenge to the dreams of full presence and reassuring foundation is produced through labour [*travail*], not a play, of interpretation. Yet, perversely, when Derrida approaches Artaud, he is not looking for interpretation or the interpretation of interpretation but for the 'tumultuous presence' of an 'archaic ground' which promises 'the meaning of an art prior to madness and the work, an art which no longer yields works, an artist's existence which is no longer a route or an experience that gives access to something other than itself.' Thus he effectively refuses Artaud the status of interpreter.
>
> More seriously, by crediting him with an art without works, Derrida refuses Artaud the status of creator, which is his most complex, persistent, and impassioned claim against the demiurgical imposition of constituted being. (216-17)

[3]

> je me bornerai à dire que la Révolution la plus urgente à accomplir est dans une sorte de régression dans le temps. Que nous en revenions à la mentalité ou même simplement aux habitudes de vie du Moyen Age, mais réellement et par une manière de métamorphose dans les essences, et j'estimerai alors que nous aurons accompli la seule révolution qui

"The Mysteries of the Middle Ages were not afraid to describe dramatically and objectively the obsessive temptation of a soul," he continues in "The Return of France to Sacred Principles," "to expose them in their obscurities and retreats, with all the forms that they can take, and the palpable attempts at seduction that they exert on spirits."[4] He concludes: "the Mysteries of the Middle Ages were pangs, and the dramatic trances of a trial that takes hold of the soul like a sickness, and cures it of the poisons of the spirit . . . ."[5] By privileging medieval theatre in this manner, Artaud opens the way for his further appropriation by critics of medieval drama -- an opportunity of which no critic has (as of yet, to my knowledge) taken advantage.[6]

Medievalists have been slow to comment on Artaud's obvious admiration for and glowing praise of the plays that are their objects of study for a number of reasons, not the least of which being -- it must be admitted -- his relative unfamiliarity with medieval drama. In his manifestos, Artaud was not resurrecting a dead form he had studied and with which he was very familiar. He had no more than a vague idea that an Occidental "theatre of cruelty" had once existed and therefore could again; his understanding and use of medieval drama was therefore analogous to his (mis)understanding and (mis)use of "Oriental" drama. Post-colonial critics have rightly made much of Artaud's misinterpretation and misappropriation of Balinese and other Eastern theatres,

---

> vaille la peine qu'on en parle. ("Manifeste pour un théâtre avorté." *Oeuvres Complètes* [*OC*] 2: 25)

[4]
> Les Mystères du Moyen Age ne craignaient pas de décrire dramatiquement et objectivement les tentations obsédantes d'une âme, et de les exposer dans leurs dédales et retraits avec toutes les formes qu'elles peuvent prendre, et les emprises des séductions objectives palpables qu'elles exercent sur les esprits. ("Le Retour de la France aux principes sacrés," *OC* 15: 13)

[5] "les Mystères du Moyen Age étaient des affres, les transes dramatiques d'une épreuve qui prenaient l'âme comme une maladie, et la guérissant des poisons de l'esprit . . ." (*OC* 15: 14).

[6] However, a comparative analysis of Artaud's theories and medieval dramatic practice may be forthcoming. Jody Enders, in a note to her recent article "Rhetoric, coercion, and the memory of violence," writes that she intends to publish a book on "The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty" (50, n. 13).

accusing him of constructing his "other" without regard or concern for accurate representation or contextualization. "[O]ne cannot claim that Artaud's Turn to the East was entirely altruistic or based on an understanding of its innate principles," writes Rustom Bharucha in *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*;

> It would be more accurate to say that he created his own 'East,' an imaginary Orient, from which he derived sources of rejuvenation. Not only did Artaud interpret these sources in his own way, he seemed totally oblivious of their historicity and indigenous meaning. (15)

In much the same way, Artaud constructed his own medieval "Mystery," his own ancient, sacred drama of temptation and seduction, of sickness, poison, and cure. He was not a critic but a creator of medieval theatre, and for this reason might seem an inappropriate object of study or source of inspiration for those interested in "genuine" medieval drama -- that is, in the plays in their historical, cultural, and performative contexts.

Still, Artaud's theories are seductive and enticing, and this for a couple of reasons. First of all, his explanations and descriptions of medieval drama, despite his apparent unfamiliarity with or lack of interest in specific texts, are at times so perfectly in harmony with and at other times so utterly (heretically) opposed to medieval theatrical practice and theory that they demand serious analysis, and are capable of provoking fresh discussion on aspects of the drama not considered at present to be controversial or unresolved. Further, the very personal characteristics that, according to modern critics, make Artaud the ideal post-structuralist subject or actor -- his madness, addiction, effeminacy, heresy, anarchism, and fascism -- would have made him, if not quite the ideal, then the inevitable or archetypal actor according to both orthodox and heretical critics of secular and religious drama. Artaud embodied in his self and theatre what opponents of the drama feared it already was or could soon become.

These then are the justifications for the following study, a comparison / contrast of Artaud's twentieth-century "medieval" theatre of cruelty and fifteenth- and sixteenth-century English biblical and Corpus Christi drama. Its intention is not to locate the post-modern in the medieval, nor to reinterpret the medieval as post-modern; neither does it mean to present Antonin Artaud as a particularly adept or knowledgeable critic of English miracle plays. This is not an analysis or critical discussion of Artaud's reading of medieval drama, but rather is itself a reading of medieval drama made through or with reference to Artaud. As such, it is perhaps yet another immoral appropriation of a poet / actor / writer who has been patronized and silenced in his many critical evocations -- yet it is so to a purpose, and has an objective of which, I hope, Artaud himself would approve. Artaud's theatre of cruelty celebrates the infection of the spirit by the body; his main task was to disrupt a theatre dominated by the Word and to institute a theatre wholly occupied by the flesh. In contrast, the medieval dramatist's goal, often forgotten or glossed over by modern critics, was to disrupt (or at least avoid) a theatre dominated by the flesh and to institute a theatre occupied (as much as possible) by the Word. Artaud was not completely successful in his task, but neither was his medieval counterpart. Any discussion of Artaud thus allows and encourages a close examination of that inherent, disruptive, fleshly aspect of theatre denied or ignored in modern critical analyses of English medieval drama. Artaud reminds us that theatre is a type of representation that operates through living, physical bodies subject to disease, death, and decay.

Medieval audiences needed no such reminder. As will be discussed, they faced the threat of their bodies' physical dissolution through infection by leprosy, plague, and other diseases on an almost daily basis; they struggled with spiritual abjection as produced and expressed in fine, often inappreciable distinctions between orthodoxy and heresy established by the Church; and they continually experienced their own incompletion as speaking subjects, their fundamental separation from truth as well as their identity as mere performance or imitation of Christ (*imitatio Christi*), as they awaited the Messiah's return and their subsequent individual and collective, eternal physical stabilization. Artaud advocated a return to and an appreciation of this state of "cruelty" or "plague" at the very point in human history -- between the two World Wars -- when it first seemed possible that the uncertainty, abjection, and incompletion that threatened individual subjects and societies might well be overcome by cure-all antibiotics, vaccines, and other scientific, social, and political advancements. Sadly, this was far from the case: bizarre new infectious diseases (such as AIDS, Ebola, and Hantavirus) have since arisen; drought and famine still affect large portions of the globe and of human populations; both tyranny and revolution continue to manifest themselves through torture, rape, and genocide. These new and yet familiar phenomena make us mindful again of the body, warn us (as did Artaud) that bodies truly matter, that flesh is (at least in this world) the stuff and limits of the subject, the media of its performance. Medieval theatre, along with its doubles of heresy and disease, can better help us to appreciate and understand Artaud's concern to focus attention again on the flesh. Therefore this study, in addition to providing an analysis of medieval drama made through or with reference to Artaud, also offers a reading of Artaud and his theory of cruelty made through or with reference to medieval drama.

Summary of the Text and Notes on Translation

The following study begins in chapter one with a general discussion of the concepts of plague, heresy, and theatre, and of their nature as "doubles" of life or "reality," as found in both Artaud's theories and in medieval popular and ecclesiastical religion. In chapter two, the problem of language, identified and described in very similar terms by both Artaud and medieval theologians, is discussed with reference to Middle English biblical drama; the separation of body and spirit, and therefore of thought and word, of idea and expression, is traced from humanity's Fall in the Garden of Eden to Christ's Incarnation and finally, to Antichrist's Advent. Chapter three outlines a number of strategies used by those in opposition to God and the Word (the Jews) in their rejection of *Logos* and therefore of faith; chapter four then goes on to analyse God's response to this opposition, and the paradoxical way in which this response ends by resembling the rejection (even deconstruction) of faith it seeks to address and answer. Finally, in chapter five, the problem of sustaining Christ's "law" of revolution and incompletion is discussed, as are, in the conclusion, the implications for humanity and for God of the end of linear time and therefore plague at the Last Judgement.

Whenever possible, published translations of Artaud's writings are provided. These translations are included in a separate section under Artaud in the list of works cited, and are referred to in the body of the text by translator. On occasion, I supply my own English approximations of Artaud's very poetic and complex writing; I refer to these as "approximations" because Artaud is notoriously difficult to translate. It is for this reason that the original French quotations are provided in all cases in the footnotes. Readers with any knowledge of the language are encouraged and advised to consult these notes.

Where published translations of other sources are available, they are provided. French, Latin, and German texts are not generally supplied in the original (as they are for Artaud) unless a translation is my own, in which case the reader is again, if possible, encouraged and advised to consult the original text, given in the footnotes.

Chapter 1

The Theatre and the Plague, Modern and Medieval

1. Artaud's Plague

In *Theater and its Double*, Artaud rejects all conventional medical explanations of the plague's means of transmission. While he acknowledges that there must be a virus responsible for the disease, he refuses to believe that the microbes identified as the source of the plague are really its cause:

> In 1880 or so, a French doctor by the name of Yersin, working on some cadavers of Indo-Chinese natives who had died of the plague, isolated one of those round-headed, short-tailed tadpoles which only the microscope can reveal and called it the plague microbe. Personally, I regard this microbe only as a smaller -- infinitely smaller -- material element which appears at some moment in the development of the virus, but which in no way accounts for the plague. (trans. Richards 21)[1]

Further, he dismisses as "idiotic" ("idiot") all scientific attempts to establish the plague's geographical point of origin (22; Gallimard 31). Western science (and Western morality) delights in identifying Asia as the birthplace of the disease and in placing the responsibility for the horrific "pandemic" squarely on its shoulders.[2] However, Artaud points out, "the Egyptian plague is not the Oriental plague, which is not that described by Hippocrates, which is not that of Syracuse, nor of Florence, nor the Black Death which accounted for fifty million lives in medieval Europe" (22).[3] No two plagues are alike; they are localized and particular, specific to the country and people which they infect. No theory of material viral infection can account for this, Artaud insists, nor can it satisfactorily explain how "numerous epidemics of a plague with all the characteristic symptoms of Oriental plague could suddenly break out in medieval Europe in places having no contact whatever with the Orient" (22).[4]

---

[1] En 1880 en quelques, un docteur français du nom de Yersin, qui travaille sur les cadavres d'Indo-Chinois morts de la peste, isole un de ces têtards au crâne arrondi, et à la queue courte, qu'on ne décèle qu'au microscope et il appelle cela le microbe de la peste. Ce n'est là à mes yeux qu'un élément matériel plus petit, infiniment plus petit qui apparaît à un moment quelconque du développement du virus, mais cela ne m'explique en rien la peste. (*Le théâtre et son double* 31)

All subsequent English references to *Theater and its Double* (*TD*) are to Mary Caroline Richards' translation; all French references are to the Gallimard edition.

[2] Throughout history, plagues and other pestilences have been "traced" by various societies to their respective, detested "others." Syphilis (which reached epidemic proportions in Europe in the early sixteenth century) was called the Neapolitan malady by the French; the Spaniards in their turn maintained that the disease had originated in France; meanwhile, the Germans referred to it as Spanish scabies (Tannahill 282).

In the last twenty years, the AIDS epidemic has prompted a flurry of both political posturing and (sadly even) scientific inquiry concerned with locating a first cause or place of origin of the pandemic, and thus, in practical terms, with laying blame. Because the disease was first observed in the United States among homosexual men, responsibility for its growth and spread was immediately assigned to a hated minority of the American population, to their "immoral lifestyle" and "sexual perversion." Religious leaders such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson insisted that AIDS was an instrument of God's wrath specifically directed against homosexuals, and that "scientists were 'frankly lying' when they claimed that HIV could be transmitted heterosexually"

(Garrett 469). Scientists in turn rashly identified and vilified the French-Canadian flight attendant Gaetan Dugas as the man responsible for spreading GRID (Gay-Related Immunodeficiency Disease, as it was then called) in North America (306), speculating that Dugas had acquired the virus while overseas. Harvard researcher Max Essex then provided support for this theory by announcing that he had identified the (external) geographical point of origin of HIV: the discovery of an AIDS-like virus in captive monkeys seemed to suggest that "AIDS started as an African monkey disease, and only recently, through an unknown means, entered the human population" (353).

As late as 1990, many politicians and scientists continued to deny the possibility of heterosexual transmission of GRID or HIV, despite what seemed to be an epidemic of the disease among heterosexual men and women in both Haiti and Africa. The idea that HIV could be transmitted through "normal" sexual relations was so repellent to North Americans that a number of scientists and members of the media blamed other sexual "perversions" for its spread. At the first International Conference on AIDS held in Atlanta in April 1985, three visiting Zairian scientists, already understandably "upset by allegations that AIDS was Africa's dubious gift to the rest of the world" (353), were posed a remarkably insensitive and offensive question by an American journalist. "We have all heard what Max Essex said here about AIDS originating as an African monkey disease," the reporter began; "Tell me, doctor, is it true that Africans have sex with monkeys?" (353). The racist assumptions underlying this statement and others like it would prompt Kenya's President, Daniel arap Moi, to proclaim: "African AIDS reports are a new form of hate campaign" (354).

Ironically, a survey taken in Lagos in 1987 revealed that Nigerians had in turn assigned the disease to their "other." According to the poll, eighty-five percent of those respondents living in Lagos believed that AIDS afflicted only caucasians, and that therefore the only way to contract the disease was by having sex with a white man (473).

[3] "la peste d'Égypte n'est pas celle d'Orient qui n'est pas celle d'Hippocrate, qui n'est pas celle de Syracuse, qui n'est pas celle de Florence, la Noire, à laquelle l'Europe du Moyen Age doit ses cinquante millions de morts" (31-32).

[4] "des foyers multiples d'une peste qui avait toutes les caractéristiques de la peste orientale, aient pu éclater soudainement dans l'Europe du Moyen Age en des endroits sans aucun contact avec l'Orient" (32).

Even in instances where a point of contact can be established, Artaud reassures us that the Oriental plague does not so much infect Western societies as encourage domestic plagues to emerge from dormancy. He relates the story of the ship *Grand-Saint-Antoine* which in April or May of 1720 landed in Marseille. The ship had earlier been refused harbour in Cagliari by the viceroy of Sardinia, Saint-Rémys, who had had a "particularly afflicting dream: he saw himself infected by the plague he dreamed was ravaging the whole of his tiny state" (15).[5] Saint-Rémys immediately turned the infested ship away, forcing it to continue on to Leghorn; it then entered the Marseille roadstead, where it finally unloaded its cargo (16). The rest, as the saying goes, is history. Every crew member but the captain contracted the disease, some dying immediately, some dispersing to other countries, carrying the disease with them. Yet Artaud is careful to stress that, despite appearances, "The *Grand-Saint-Antoine* did not bring the plague to Marseille" (16). The plague was actually already there -- "And at a point of particular recrudescence" (16).[6] Until the arrival of *Grand-Saint-Antoine*, "its centers had been successfully localized" (16)[7] by authorities no doubt as vigilant as Saint-Rémys, but with its arrival all hell broke loose. The Oriental plague did not infect the people and state of Marseille, but reactivated and released some latent virus.

The plague is an opportunistic disease, residing in its host (the individual body or on a larger scale the state) for years, localized and contained by systems specifically designed to keep it in check. However, because the plague is not infectious but rather communicative, because it is "a kind of psychic entity"[8] not carried by any virus as conventionally understood (18), containment and localization cannot hold the disease at bay forever. According to Artaud, this is one aspect of the disease that medical science has completely failed to explain in its theory of viral infection:

---

[5] "un rêve particulièrement affligeant: il se vit pesteux et il vit la peste ravager son minuscule État" (21).

[6] "Le *Grand-Saint-Antoine* n'apporta pas la peste à Marseille. Elle était là. Et dans une période de particulière recrudescence" (23).

[7] "on était parvenu à en localiser les foyers" (23).

[8] "une sorte d'entité psychique" (26).

> No one can say why the plague strikes the coward who flees it and spares the degenerate who gratifies himself on the corpses. Why distance, chastity, solitude are helpless against the attacks of the scourge; and why a group of debauchees isolating themselves in the country, like Boccaccio with his two well-stocked companions and seven women as lustful as they were religious, can calmly wait for the warm days when the plague withdraws; and why in a nearby castle transformed into a citadel with a cordon of armed men to forbid all entree, the plague turns the garrison and all the occupants into corpses and spares only the armed men exposed to contagion. (22)[9]

What the coward and the degenerate, the chaste and the debauched do not understand is that the plague does not come from without but from within, and so all attempts to isolate oneself from its effects will more often than not be futile. Artaud makes reference to Prince Prospero, the "hero" of Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death," who, immured in a castle / citadel with a thousand or so of his closest friends, "amply provisioned" with food and drink and entertainment, protected from the outside world by a "strong and lofty wall," along with his companions "bid[s] defiance to contagion" (Poe 307). Certain that pleasure and security lie within, the Red Death without, their comfortable prison (307), Prospero decides to celebrate good health with a masquerade. When one of his guests has the bad taste to attend in the guise of a corpse clearly exhibiting the marks of plague, the other revellers are shocked and disgusted, and, almost immediately, themselves succumb to the disease. Like "a thief in the night" (311), the Red Death has either penetrated the citadel's considerable defences or has somehow remained concealed within them, completely undetected, from the time all gates were sealed. Moments before their own deaths, members of the angry crowd tear the grave clothes from the stranger and object of their disgust, only to find them completely empty, "untenanted by any tangible form" (311). The Red Death is neither absent nor present where the crowd expects it. It is neither "without" the citadel nor localized in the figure of the stranger, but has taken up residence or has always already been present within the individual revellers who now "die each in the despairing posture of his fall" (311).

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[9] Personne ne dira pourquoi la peste frappe le lâche qui fuit et épargne le paillard qui se satisfait sur des cadavres. Pourquoi l'éloignement, la chasteté, la solitude sont sans action contre les atteintes du fléau, et pourquoi tel groupement de débauchés qui s'est isolé à la compagne, comme Boccace avec deux compagnons bien montés et sept dévotes luxurieuses, peut attendre en paix les jours chauds au milieu desquels la peste se retire; et pourquoi dans un château à proximité, transformé en citadelle guerrière avec un cordon d'hommes d'armes qui en interdisent l'entrée, la peste transforme toute la garnison et les occupants en cadavres et épargne les hommes d'armes, seuls exposés à la contagion. (32)

As Jane Goodall notes in her article, "The Plague and its Powers in Artaudian Theatre," Prospero and his companions put themselves at greater risk of contracting the Red Death because they are unable to read its semiotics (530). They do not understand that "the power base of horror is always inside, a molten core of being" (530), nor do they understand that horror, like the plague, not only "erupts . . . in defiance of all logically calculated defenses" (530), but is perversely attracted to or encouraged by those same, seemingly logical defences. Retreating into a fortified castle, Prospero naïvely assumes "that he can evade [the Red Death] by [employing] the very strategies of liminality against which its influence is pervasively manifested" (530). On an individual, biological scale, the plague causes the insides of its individual victims to stream toward the outside, breaking through the defensive boundary of the skin in bubos "wherever the organism discharges either its internal rottenness or, according to the case, its life" (*TD* 20).[10] Meanwhile, on a larger, social scale, the plague targets and destroys the physical objects and human / political forces which realize and impose civic order, until finally "There is no maintenance of roads and sewers, no army, no police, no municipal administration" (23).[11] As "poisonous, thick, bloody streams . . . gush out of the corpses" already clogging the roadways, "houses open" and more "delirious victims, their minds crowded with hideous visions, spread howling through the streets"

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[10] "par où l'organisme se décharge, ou de sa pourriture interne ou, suivant le cas, de sa vie" (28).

[11] "il n'y a plus de voirie, d'armée, de police, de municipalité" (33).

(23).[12] Law and order collapses right along with biological and municipal infrastructures as the last of the living abandon their socially determined roles:

> the obedient and virtuous son kills his father; the chaste man performs sodomy upon his neighbors. The lecher becomes pure. The miser throws his gold in handfuls out of the window. The warrior hero sets fire to the city he once risked his life to save. The dandy decks himself out in his finest clothes and promenades before the charnel houses. (24)[13]

Finally, and inexplicably, recovered victims are taken with "a surge of erotic fever" (24) which prevents them from fleeing the city. Instead, they "remain where they are, trying to wrench a criminal pleasure from the dying or even the dead, half crushed under the pile of corpses where chance has lodged them" (24).[14]

Given such examples of blatantly irrational behaviour, it comes as no surprise that "the plague seems to manifest its presence in and have a preference for the very organs of the body, the particular physical sites, where human will, consciousness, and thought are imminent and apt to occur" (21).[15] Should an autopsy be performed upon a plague victim, Artaud maintains that one would find "neither loss nor destruction of matter" in the majority of cases, but would, on occasion, observe "injured lungs and brain[s]" that had blackened and grown gangrenous (20). Probing the damaged organs with a medical instrument, one would see the "softened and pitted lungs fall into chips of some unknown black substance" and would watch as the victim's brain "melts, shrinks, granulates to a sort of coal-black dust" (20).[16] As Artaud observes, we

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[12] "épais vireux . . . rejaillissent des cadavres" (34). "Des rues entières sont barrées par des entassements de morts. C'est alors que les maisons s'ouvrent, que des pestiférés délirants, l'esprit chargé d'imaginations affreuses, se répandent en hurlant par les rues" (33).

[13]
> le fils, jusque-là soumis et vertueux, tue son père; le continent sodomise ses proches. Le luxurieux devient pur. L'avare jette son or à poignées par les fenêtres. Le héros guerrier incendie la ville qu'il s'est autrefois sacrifié pour sauver. L'élégant se pomponne et va se promener sur les charniers. (34-35)

[14] "comment expliquer cette poussée de fièvre érotique chez des pestiférés guéris qui, au lieu de fuir, demeurent sur place, cherchant à arracher une volupté condamnable à des mourantes ou même à des mortes, à demi écrasées sous l'entassement de cadavres où le hasard les a nichées" (35).

[15] "La peste donc semble manifester sa présence dans les lieux, affectionner tous les lieux du corps, tous les emplacements de l'espace physique, où la volonté humaine, la conscience, la pensée sont proches et en passe de se manifester" (30-31).

> can keep ourselves from breathing or from thinking, can speed up our respiration, give it any rhythm we choose, make it conscious or unconscious at will . . . . We can similarly accelerate, retard, and give an arbitrary rhythm to our thinking -- can regulate the unconscious play of the mind. (21)[17]

Although our control over these organs and processes would seem to be positive or beneficial, it somehow renders the brain and lungs particularly susceptible to the plague. Just as the disease shows a marked tendency to target boundaries, defences, borders, and walls, it seems inclined to attack sites of human consciousness and will. Whether the brain and lungs putrefy in the early stages of the disease, robbing the victim of all ability to think and act consciously from the time he or she contracts it, or whether the brain and lungs rot in the latter stages of the disease as a result of a hyperactivity somehow induced in these organs by the plague, Artaud neglects to say. Either phenomenon could explain the frenzy of those suffering from and living in the midst of the plague, could explain their gratuitously absurd acts which neither "the idea of an absence of sanctions nor that of imminent death suffices to motivate" (24).[18] A complete lack of social consciousness and will to obey could lead to the anarchy seen in the plague house and city, as could a hyper-consciousness and understanding of social constructs paired with a stimulated sense of individual will.

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[16] il n'y a ni perte ni destruction de matière . . . . les poumons et le cerveau lésés noircissent et se gangrènent. Les poumons ramollis, coupaillés, tombant en copeaux d'on ne sait quelle matière noire, le cerveau fondu, limé, pulvérisé, réduit en poudre, désagrégé en une sorte de poussière de charbon noir. (29)

[17] "On peut s'empêcher de respirer ou de penser, on peut précipiter sa respiration, la rythmer à son gré, la rendre à volonté consciente ou inconsciente . . . . On peut également précipiter, ralentir et rythmer sa pensée. On peut réglementer le jeu inconscient de l'esprit" (30).

[18] "Ni l'idée d'une absence de sanctions, ni celle de la mort proche ne suffisent à motiver des actes aussi gratuitement absurdes . . ." (35).

In either case, the plague is inextricably tied to social law and government -- both in its external (police, army, courts) and internal (Oedipal triangle, law against incest) forms. Outbreaks of the plague are inevitably accompanied or incited by social upheavals:

> The Bible and Herodotus both call attention to the lightning-like appearance of the plague which in one night decimated the 180,000 men of the Assyrian army, thereby saving the Egyptian empire . . . . The fact [of this outbreak] is comparable to the epidemic which broke out in 660 B.C. in the holy city of Mékao, Japan, on the occasion of a mere change of government.
>
> The plague of 1502 in Provence, which furnished Nostradamus his first opportunities to exercise his powers as a healer, coincided with the most profound political upheavals, downfalls or deaths of kings . . . exoduses of Jews. (18)[19]

Cataclysms and devastations, war, revolt, and destruction are always preceded by natural and social portents, omens of terrible things to come in the not-too-distant future. Unfortunately those in a position to influence the course of events (and of the disease) are more often than not "too stupid to foresee" its effects and "not perverse enough actually to desire" them (18).[20] Such was the case with the harbour masters in Marseille in 1720 who welcomed the *Grand-Saint-Antoine* with its plague-infested cargo. Such was not the case with Saint-Rémys who, very conscious of his own slipping authority -- Artaud suggests that his "reduced monarchical responsibilities had perhaps sensitized him to the most pernicious of viruses" (15)[21] -- had the foresight to take preventative measures. Nor is it the case with the "dregs of the population" who, at the height of the plague's virulence, "apparently immunized by their frenzied greed, enter the open houses and pillage riches they know will serve no purpose or profit" (24).[22]

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[19] La Bible et Hérodote sont d'accord pour signaler l'apparition fulgurante d'une peste qui décima, en une nuit, les cent quatre-vingt mille hommes de l'armée assyrienne, sauvant ainsi l'empire égyptien . . . . Le fait est à rapprocher de l'épidémie qui explosa l'an 660 avant J.-C. dans la ville sacrée de Mékao au Japon, à l'occasion d'un simple changement de gouvernement.

La peste de 1502 en Provence, qui fournit à Nostradamus l'occasion d'exercer pour la première fois ses facultés de guérisseur, coïncida aussi dans l'ordre politique avec les bouleversements les plus profonds, chutes ou morts de rois . . . exodes de Juifs. (25-26)

[20] "sont trop stupides pour prévoir, et ne sont pas assez pervers pour désirer réellement les effets" (26).

[21] "ses responsabilités réduites de monarque avaient peut-être sensibilisé [Saint-Rémys] aux virus les plus pernicieux" (21).

There are then three possible ways in which men and women may respond to the plague: they may ignore its development and, "without bubos, delirium, pain, or rash, examine themselves proudly in the mirror, in splendid health, as they think, and then fall dead with their shaving mugs in their hands, full of scorn for other victims" (23);[23] they may throw themselves headlong into the fray, running "in shrieking pursuit of [their] visions" (24);[24] or they may, if granted a sensitivity to and an understanding of what is already present in the social body, threatening its dissolution, choose to suppress the plague and, in so doing, harness its considerable power. Self-delusion, anarchy, and tyranny are the only possible responses to the plague's "approach," and each individual must choose his or her own course of action. The anarchist may or may not survive -- after the crisis of plague "nothing remains except death or an extreme purification" (31).[25] Similarly, the tyrant may win for himself absolute control or be deposed and rendered powerless. Saint-Rémys, having ordered the *Grand-Saint-Antoine* to sail away from Cagliari "under threat of being sunk by cannon shot," had to contend with the "sarcasms of the crowd and the skepticism of his followers," who were shocked by the ferocity of his orders (16).[26] He had trespassed "not only upon the rights of man, but upon the simplest respect for human life and upon all sorts of national or international conventions" by turning the ship away (16),[27] and had earned for himself the title of despot among the people. However, public opinion rebounded in his favour as soon as the reason (or pretext) for his harsh actions came to light. At that time his name and title were assured a place of honour in history; as Artaud writes: "the town of Cagliari, learning some time later that the ship turned from its shores by the despotic will of its viceroy, its miraculously enlightened viceroy, was at the source of the great epidemic of Marseille, recorded the fact into its archive, where it can be found today" (17).[28] It hardly mattered that the ship was not, in the end, the source of contagion. The threat of external plague allowed Saint-Rémys to employ and thus increase his own lawless power, and to prevent an outbreak of internal plague. Yet he took a calculated risk, since events could just as easily have led to his deposition and execution.

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[22] "Dans les maisons ouvertes, la lie de la population immunisée, semble-t-il, par sa frénésie cupide, entre et fait main basse sur des richesses dont elle sent bien qui'il est inutile de profiter" (34).

[23] "sans bubons, sans douleur, sans délire et sans pétéchies, se regardent orgueilleusement dans des glaces, se sentant crever de santé, tombent morts avec dans leurs mains leur plat à barbe, pleins de mépris pour les autres pestiférés" (34).

[24] "criant à la poursuite de [leurs] images" (36).

[25] "il ne reste rien que la mort ou qu'une extrême purification" (46).

[26] "sous peine d'être coulé à coups de canon" (22); "les sarcasmes de la foule et le scepticisme de son entourage" (22).

2. Artaud, the Plague, and the Theatre

Relying on no less an authority than Saint Augustine, Artaud emphasizes the "similarity between the action of the plague that kills without [materially] destroying the organs and the theater which, without killing, provokes the most mysterious alterations in the mind of not only an individual but an entire populace" (*TD* 26).[29] He quotes a passage from *The City of God* (bk. 1, ch. 32) in which Augustine describes the origins of drama and its peculiar affinity with the plague:

> The public games, those disgusting spectacles of frivolous immorality, were instituted at Rome not by the viciousness of men but by the orders of those gods of yours. It would be

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[27] "non seulement sur le droit des gens, mais sur le plus simple respect de la vie humaine, et sur toutes sortes de conventions nationales ou internationales" (22-23).

[28] "la ville de Cagliari, apprenant quelque temps après que le navire chassé de ses côtes par la volonté despotique du prince miraculeusement éclairé, était à l'origine de la grande épidémie de Marseille, recueillit le fait dans ses archives, où n'importe qui peut le retrouver" (24).

[29] "[la] similitude d'action entre la peste qui tue sans détruire d'organes et le théâtre qui, sans tuer, provoque dans l'esprit non seulement d'un individu, mais d'un peuple, les plus mystérieuses altérations" (37).

> less offensive to decree divine honour to the great Scipio [who in 155 persuaded the Senate to abandon the building of a stone theatre] than to worship gods of this kind. Those gods were of less worth than their pontiff . . . . The gods ordered theatrical shows to be put on in their honour to allay a plague which attacked the body, while the pontiff stopped the erection of a theatre to prevent a plague which would infect the soul. If you have enough light in your minds to prefer the soul to the body, choose which you should worship! For if the bodily plague did come to a halt, it was not because the more sophisticated craze for theatrical shows had intruded itself into a warlike people who had hitherto been used only to circus games. The truth is that the powers of evil foresaw, in their cleverness, that the plague would soon come to its natural end, and they craftily used this opportunity to bring upon you a far more serious pestilence, which gives them greater satisfaction. For this disease attacks not the body but the character. (43-44).[30]

Augustine distinguishes between two types of plague: that of the flesh and that of the soul, or that of theatre. Both are inspired by heathen gods: the first as a scourge or instrument to make their will known; the second as a form of appeasement, a seemingly preferable alternative to physical death. However, Augustine understands that the theatre is simply a more dangerous strain of the same disease. Although both affect important collectivities and upset them in identical ways (*TD* 27; Gallimard 39), the plague's primary end is the death of the body -- the death of the state is more or less a side-effect. Theatre, however, targets the state first, targets the "character" or the soul (or in Artaud's translation of Augustine, "[les] moeurs" or "customs"), and affects the body only secondarily.

Therefore, while comparisons between the two plagues abound in Artaud's writing, there is always the sense that theatre is the purer form of disease. Each is described as "an avenging scourge, a redeeming epidemic" (31),[31] as being simultaneously "the direct instrument or materialization of an intelligent force" (18)[32] and "nothing but the application of a law of nature . . . in which credulous ages have chosen to see the finger of God" (31).[33] Each takes "images that are dormant, a latent disorder, and suddenly extends them into the most extreme gestures" (27);[34] each is "a delirium" and is "communicative" (27; Gallimard 39). There are instances of perfect theatre in the plague-infested city: Artaud compares the actions of debauched survivors pillaging "riches they know will serve no purpose or profit" to the "immediate gratuitousness" of theatrical "acts without use or profit" (24).[35] However, such nonsensical, ineffectual, insubstantial actions may or may not be inspired by the plague -- some victims will persist in thinking themselves well and in carrying out normal, everyday activities (such as shaving) while the plague rages within them. This is not possible within the theatre, for profitless actions are its very stuff. Representation is essentially gratuitous since the performer who plays at fury, passion, dejection (as does the first player in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, waxing eloquent on the subject of Hecuba) has no cause for these emotions and no means to vent them, were they real.[36] Unlike the murderer's

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[30] Artaud translates this passage as follows:

> 'Sachez . . . vous qui l'ignorez, que ces jeux scéniques, spectacles de turpitudes, n'ont pas été établis à Rome par les vices des hommes, mais par l'ordre de vos dieux. Il serait plus raisonnable de rendre les honneurs divins à Scipion qu'à de pareils dieux; certes, ils ne valaient pas leur pontife! . . . .
>
> Pour apaiser la peste qui tuait les corps, vos dieux réclament en leur honneur ces jeux scéniques, et votre pontife, voulant éviter cette peste qui corrompt les âmes, s'oppose à la construction de la scène elle-même. S'il vous reste encore quelques lueurs d'intelligence pour préférer l'âme au corps, choisissez qui mérite vos adorations; car la ruse des Esprits mauvais prévoyant que la contagion allait cesser dans les corps, saisit avec joie cette occasion d'introduire un fléau beaucoup plus dangereux, puisqu'il s'attaque non pas aux corps, mais aux moeurs.' (37-38)

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[31] "un fléau vengeur, [une] épidémie salvatrice" (46).

[32] "l'instrument direct ou la matérialisation d'une force intelligente" (25).

[33] "les époques crédules ont voulu voir le doigt de Dieu [dans la peste] . . . qui n'est pas autre chose que l'application d'une loi de nature" (46).

[34] "des images qui dorment, un désordre latent et les pousse tout à coup jusqu'aux gestes les plus extrêmes" (39-40).

[35] "la lie de la population . . . entre et fait main basse sur des richesses dont elle sent bien qu'il est inutile de profiter. Et c'est alors que le théâtre s'installe. Le théâtre, c'est-à-dire la gratuité immédiatement qui pousse à des actes inutiles et sans profit pour l'actualité" (34).

[36] Having heard the impassioned speech delivered by the first player on the subject of Priam's death and Hecuba's distress at the discovery of his body, Hamlet wonders:

> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all the visage wann'd,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,

fury which "exhausts itself" in homicide, accomplishes an act, "discharges . . . and loses contact with the force that inspired it but can no longer sustain it" (25),[37] that of the tragic actor "remains enclosed within a perfect circle," takes "a form that negates itself to just the degree it frees itself and dissolves into universality (25).[38] In more strictly medieval terms, the actor's actions are mere "signs without deeds," empty and hollow, full of sound and fury, without cause, without significance, and without (their expected or anticipated) effect.

Traditionally, at least with regard to human subjects and events, actual or "authentic" experience is privileged over theatrical simulation. In the *Confessions*, Augustine, describing his own past attraction to the theatre and desire to witness the pains of others represented on the stage, explains the special appeal that Roman tragedies hold for audiences by pointing out that most human beings "enjoy pitying others" (56; bk. 3, ch. 2), whether those others are real or imaginary. When we do, "friendly feelings well up in us like the waters of a spring" (56) and we experience joy. If inspired by actual persons or authentic suffering, such waters of compassion flow according to "their true course" and the subject experiences a "heavenly calm" (56). However, if spurred on by inauthentic or simulated sorrow, these same waters "trickle away to join that stream of boiling pitch, the hideous flood of lust" (56). Part of the problem is that theatrical suffering stimulates and indulges the sensualist without chastising his flesh:

> I did not seek the kind of sorrow which would wound me deeply, for I had no wish to endure the sufferings which I saw on the stage; but I enjoyed fables and fictions, which

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A broken voice, an' his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing,
For Hecuba!
What's Hecuba to him, or he to [Hecuba],
That he should weep for her? (2.2.551-60)

[37] "la fureur de l'assassin . . . s'épuise . . . a accompli un acte, elle se décharge et perd le contact d'avec la force qui l'inspire, mais ne l'alimentera plus désormais" (36-37).

[38] "demeure dans un cercle pur et fermé (36); "[e]lle [la fureur] a pris une forme, celle de l'acteur, qui se nie à mesure qu'elle se dégage, se fond dans l'universalité" (37).

> could only graze the skin. But where the fingers scratch, the skin becomes inflamed. It swells and festers with hideous pus. (57)

Simulated pain and anguish also rob the audience of an opportunity for positive, constructive, compassionate response. "[W]hat sort of pity can we really feel for an imaginary scene on the stage?" Augustine wonders; "The audience is not called upon to offer help but only to feel sorrow . . ." (56). The late fourteenth or early fifteenth-century Wyclifite *Tretise of Miraclis Pleying* would later condemn audience members who shed copious tears while they viewed dramatizations of Christ's Passion for much the same reason. In response to claims that the plays inspire true "compassion and devocion" in their spectators (p. 98, l. 164), the *Tretise* states:

> ʒiche miraclis pleyinge giveth noon occasioun of werrey wepinge and medeful, but the weping that fallith to men and wymmen by the sighte of siche miraclis pleyinge, as they ben not principaly for theire oune sinnes ne of theire gode feith withinneforthe, but more of theire sight withouteforth is not alowable byfore God but more reprowable. For sithen Crist himsilf reprovyde the wymmen that wepten upon him in his passioun, myche more they ben reprovable that wepen for the pley of Cristis passioun, leevinge to wepen for the sinnes of hemsilf and of theire children, as Crist bad the wymmen that wepten on him. (p. 102, ll. 301-311)

In contrast, Artaud agrees that theatrical simulation precludes what is generally considered to be "authentic" action, but unlike Augustine and other Platonic Realists (indeed, more like Oscar Wilde, who championed the artful lie at the end of the nineteenth century), he privileges the imitation over the "real":

> Once launched upon the fury of his task, the actor requires infinitely more power to keep from committing a crime than a murderer needs courage to complete his act, and it is here, in its very gratuitousness, that the action and effect of a feeling in the theater appears infinitely more valid than that of a feeling fulfilled in life. (*TD* 25)[39]

The empty sign which seems to represent nothing substantial rather paradoxically derives its validity (according to Artaud) from its power to *reveal*. In this, it resembles the plague:

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[39] Une fois lancé dans sa fureur, il faut infiniment plus de vertu à l'acteur pour s'empêcher de commettre un crime qu'il ne faut de courage à l'assassin pour parvenir à exécuter le sien, et c'est ici que, dans sa gratuité, l'action d'un sentiment au théâtre, apparaît comme quelque chose d'infiniment plus valable que celle d'un sentiment réalisé. (36)

> If the essential theater is like the plague, it is not because it is contagious, but because like the plague it is the revelation, the bringing forth, the exteriorization of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an individual or a people, are localized. (30)[40]

In Artaud's opinion, theatre and the plague are more real than conventional reality *because* they do not represent anything substantial; they reveal nothing -- no laws, no ties of affiliation, no prescribed manners of action, nothing. They do not correspond to a reality, an idea or universal, other or separate from themselves, and so trouble any and all distinctions between "actual" and "simulated," "authentic" and "inauthentic." This is cruelty, the prospect that all the perverse possibilities of the mind (individual or collective) can and must eventually come to the surface of the body. If theatre is plague and plague is theatre, then both are "life" and "life" is both. The only difference is that plague and theatre are localized and contained in time or in space and are thus sanctioned and somehow "safe." Both are, according to Artaud, "the time of evil, the triumph of dark powers" (30), which suggests the existence of good and light -- a binary Artaud maintains "is the fault not of the plague nor of the theater, but of life" itself (31).[41] For at the same time as "theater, like the plague . . . [impels] men to see themselves as they are . . . causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world" (31),[42] it necessitates those very masks, lies, and hypocrisies. "In the theater as in the plague there is something both victorious and vengeful" (27)[43] -- against corporal and social collectivities, but also against the theatre and plague. Both diseases must eventually run their course, as Artaud acknowledges: "all the great plagues, with or without virus, have a duration of five months, after which their virulence abates . . ." (22).[44] Then follows death or cure. Artaud neglects to specify what he means by either. Physical death could be cure, since it renders the individual and state immune from further decay and tyrannical manipulation. Alternately, physical cure could be death, if that cure results in the re-establishment and re-assertion of law and order on the physical or social *corpus*.

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[40] Si le théâtre essentiel est comme la peste, ce n'est pas parce qu'il est contagieux, mais parce que comme la peste il est la révélation, la mise en avant, la poussée vers l'extérieur d'un fond de cruauté latente par lequel se localisent sur un individu ou sur un peuple toutes les possibilités perverses de l'esprit. (44)

[41] "Comme la peste [le théâtre] est le temps du mal, le triomphe des forces noires . . . . et si ces possibilités et ces forces sont noires, c'est la faute non pas de la peste ou du théâtre, mais de la vie" (44, 45).

[42] "Le théâtre comme la peste . . . [pousse] les hommes à se voir tels qu'ils sont, elle fait tomber le masque, elle découvre le mensonge, la veulerie, la bassesse, la tartuferie" (46).

[43] "Il y a dans le théâtre comme dans la peste quelque chose à la fois de victorieux et de vengeur" (39).

Artaud does, however, offer the example of Saint-Rémys, the viceroy who kept his state in good health by acting with the foresight and ferocity of a tyrant, winning for himself (in the long run) the gratitude and loyalty (if not the affection) of his subjects. Without the threat of plague he would have remained a petty official, a leader of unremarkable fame or infamy, but instead, with the threat of plague, he became the centre of "an astonishing historical fact" (15).[45] Though a true tyrant never wishes to meet anarchy face to face, he relies upon its distant -- but not too distant -- presence to justify his own power. This is the theatre, the plague, and their double.

3. The Church as Corpus Christi

Artaud invokes the familiar image of the body politic when he compares the "crazed body fluids" of the plague victim, "unsettled and commingled . . . flooding through his flesh" (*TD* 19),[46] with the plague victims themselves, insane, rushing out from their houses into streets already clogged with the bodies of the dead and dying (23; Gallimard 33). There is something in this description that suggests Artaud's comparison is more than metaphor: his vivid account of the body politic is not, like so many others, merely an argument for specialization and inequality, nor a plea for co-operation. Artaud's city is not *like* but *is* a bleeding, disease-ridden body whose only hope lies in future death or cure. It resembles more the medieval notion of the Church as corpus Christi than it does Enlightenment depictions of the body politic in either good or ill health.

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[44] "toutes les grandes pestes ont, avec ou sans virus, une durée de cinq mois, après laquelle leur virulence s'abaisse . . ." (31).

[45] "un fait historique et étonnant" (21).

[46] "Ses humeurs affolées, bousculées, en désordre . . . lui paraissent galoper à travers son corps" (27).

The idea that the Church was not only like a body but actually was a body, and more specifically the body of Christ, stemmed from a literalized interpretation of the political allegory found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
>
> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the great honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.
>
> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (NRSV 12.12-27)

Although the Church was often spoken of as the "mystic body of Christ," which seems to suggest a figurative understanding of the above passage, this mystic body was closely associated with the flesh of Christ as present in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Incorporation into the Church as corpus Christi was, technically speaking, achieved at baptism and could only be reversed by excommunication; however, it also depended upon the individual's celebration of the sacrament and so continued incorporation or ingestion of the Host, the corpus Christi itself. The Host was much more than a *sign* of Christian unity and community -- as Eamon Duffy states in *The Stripping of the Altars*, it was the "medium congruentissimum," the *instrument* or *means* of that community and harmony (92). Whether carried in procession outside the church as it was on Corpus Christi day or ingested -- as required by canon law -- at least once every year (at Easter) by each believer, the Host, through its presence among and also within individuals, "created and ordered . . . the corporate life of the body social" (26). The Host united believers in "faith, hope and charity" just "as Christ unit[ed] the members to the Head by means of his precious Passion" (92); its absence at once separated and signified the separation of the unbeliever from the "One universal Church of the faithful, outside of which absolutely no one is saved, and in which Jesus Christ is himself at once both priest and sacrifice."[47] As Saint John Chrysostom expresses it in his *Roman Breviary*, "Christ hath mingled himself with us, and infused his Body into our bodies, that we may be one together, as limbs of one body" (trans. in James 9). No one could be fully part of that body without first partaking of it.

The opposite was also true, and so, before receiving Communion, individuals had to ensure that they were worthy not only to receive Christ's flesh but to be received by it. The prayer "Salve salutaris hostia," commonly found in early sixteenth-century primers, was offered to lay celebrants as an appropriate preparation for their reception of and by the corpus Christi. Each individual was advised to pray that

> I may be worthy to be incorporated into Your body, which is the Church. May I be one of Your members, and may You be my head, that I may remain in You, and You in me, so that in the resurrection my lowly body may be conformed to Your glorious body, according to the promise of [St. Paul] the Apostle, and so that I may rejoice in You and Your glory eternal. (trans. in Duffy 93)

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[47] From the opening canon of the Fourth Lateran Council (trans. in Cohen 251).

The believer's incorporation into the corpus Christi could be described in quite graphic terms. Just as the celebrant received Christ into his body by swallowing him in the form of bread, Christ was often represented as "ingesting" the celebrant through the opening of one of his many wounds:

> O Jesus, most profound abyss of mercy: I beseech you by the depth of your wounds, which pierced your flesh to the heart and very marrow of your bones, draw me out from the depths of sin into which I have sunk, and hide me deep in the holes of your wounds from the face of your anger, Lord, until the judgement is past. (trans. in Duffy 251)

Richard Rolle, a fourteenth-century English mystic, describes Christ's wounded body as (among other things) a net in which believers might be caught and held, and a dovehouse into which they might flee from predators:

> lord, swet Ihesu, þy body is lyk to þe nette, for as a nette is ful of holys, so is þy body ful of woundes. Here, swet Ihesu, I beseche þe, cache me in to þis net of þy scourgynge, þat al my hert and love be to þe, and drawe me euyr to þe and with þe as a net draweth fyshe, til hit come to þe bank of deth, þat nevyr temptacioun, tribulacioun ne prosperite pul me fro þe, and as a nette draweth fyshe to þe lond, so, swet Ihesu, brynge me to þy blisse . . . . Efte, swet Ihesu, þy body is like to a dufhouse, for a dufhouse is ful of holys: so is þy body ful of woundes. And as a doue pursued of an hauk, yf she mow cache an hool of hir hous she is siker ynowe, so swete Ihesu, in temptacioun þy woundes ben best refuyt to us. ("Meditation B" p. 74, ll. 210-16, 221-24)

At roughly the same time, iconographic representations of Christ tended more and more to His fragmentation -- to the point that, in at least one painting (the Buxheim Altar, outer panel: *Arma Christi with the Five Wounds*), "the Savior's body disappears entirely, to be replaced by bleeding fragments" (Bynum, *Fragmentation* 279). At the centre of this curious painting we see Christ's heart, pierced by Longinus' spear, which perhaps suggests that the viewer does not see Christ's body because he is already contained within it. The Cologne Master's *Altarpiece with Cycle of the Life of Christ*, at first glance a more conventional representation of the Crucifixion, depicts Christ's body hanging as expected on the cross. However, beneath his outstretched right arm we see "the side-wound . . . presented as an independent body part" (278). Strongly resembling the female genitalia, this side wound perhaps stands as a point of entry into Christ's body, for, as

Caroline Walker Bynum notes, "medieval viewers . . . frequently spoke of entering into Christ's side as into a womb" (278). The two paintings could stand in sequence: the latter captures the moment before incorporation; the former, the moment after.

It seems likely that such varied instances of Host and body imagery both expressed and formed believers' notions of community, but the issue is a contentious one. At least one recent critic, Charles Zika, has argued that the Eucharist had little real significance with regard to medieval understanding of the body politic. In his view, the Host was merely "a site for the resolution of conflicting views as to what constitutes legitimate religious behaviour and a point of negotiation and power in the constant reformulation and implementation of religious orthodoxy and control" (27); with regard to the Mass and to Corpus Christi day celebrations, Zika concludes that "the processional form itself rather than the body of Christ . . . [was] the principal carrier of social and political meanings" (44). Other critics allow the Eucharist a greater role in the expression and constitution of community, but tend to contrast its alleged ideal perfection and wholeness as the corpus Christi with the social body's imperfection and incompletion. Conflict and disunity are firmly placed within the body politic and are not discussed with reference to the supposed model for that politic, Christ's wounded, disjointed body.[48] Even when it is acknowledged that Christ as

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[48] Mervyn James, in "Ritual, Drama, and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town," writes:

> The language of body . . . provided an instrument by means of which social wholeness and social differentiation could be conceived and experienced at many different levels. Social differentiation could be apprehended in terms of the various limbs and organs, all arranged in a hierarchical structure of different roles and functions under the overall direction of the head: the magistracy. Wholeness was seen in terms of the necessary interdependence of the constituting limbs and organs. None could subsist of themselves; their survival depended on an effective incorporation into the wholeness of the social body, and in subordination to its head. But of course these attitudes, which conceived of society as a body in which differentiation was taken up into social wholeness, were in historical fact projected by societies which were deeply divided -- riven by an intense competitiveness: by the struggle for honour and worship, status and precedence, power and wealth. (8)

Unfortunately, James makes no mention of Christ's physical body, itself once and perpetually riven by "competitiveness: by the struggle for honour and worship, status and precedence, power and wealth."

God cannot be represented or thought of as a perfect whole, that he is so "vague" and indeterminate that he connotes both nothing and everything, Christ as body somehow remains whole or completely disappears.[49] Both types of response are surely attempts to reject any and all notions of stasis and completion within both secular community and religious orthodoxy, Christ's body being either erroneously associated with that stasis and completion or considered completely irrelevant to the argument for constant social change and renegotiation. Nonetheless, in their reluctance to discuss the importance of Christ's torn and bleeding flesh, modern critics and historians give the impression that they share not a little in common with those dualist heretics -- the Manicheans, Gnostics, Bogomils, and Albigensians (or Cathars) -- despised by medieval theologians for believing that Christ's human Incarnation was incompatible with his divinity.

There is of course no doubt that disunity and schism existed within local, earthly communities -- vivid accounts of disputes and quarrels, surrounding even those ceremonies and rituals designed to promote and express peace and charity, assure us of this fact:

> Thomas Rode and William Moreton at Astbury in Cheshire quarrelled ferociously in 1513, 'concerning which of them shold sit highest in church,' and which should 'foremost goe in procession.' In 1494 the wardens of the parish of All Saints Stanyng, presented Joanna Dyaca for breaking the paxbred by throwing it on the ground, 'because another woman of the parish had kissed it before her.' On All Saints Day 1522 Master John Browne of the parish of Theydon-Garnon in Essex, having kissed the paxbred at the parish Mass, smashed it over the head of Richard Pond, the holy-water clerk who had

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[49] See Sarah Beckwith's "Ritual, Theater, and Social Space in the York Corpus Christi Cycle." Beckwith initially addresses the subject of the social *corpus* and its relation to Christ's wounded body, and asks:

> what precisely . . . is the object of representation? What, indeed, is the nominal object of festivity, of celebration? Who and what is Christ's body in the performance of the Corpus Christi pageants in York? At this point, we will need to go beyond the notion of an integrated and wholesome body being traced onto the city as if it had no resisting shape, no already delineated contours, no marked and contested spaces to make a rougher surface, a more difficult screen on which to draw the shape and outline of Christ's body and the ideology that supposedly comes along with it. (66)

Unfortunately, Beckwith seems to suggest that the city alone has a rough, resisting surface and that therefore the shape and outline of Christ's body is somehow whole. Further, after this single passage in her analysis, Beckwith allows Christ's physical body to cede to his godhead; no mention is made of his perpetually bleeding (and therefore changing) flesh.

> tendered it to him, 'causing streams of blood to run to the ground.' Brown was enraged because the pax had first been offered to Francis Hamden, the patron of the living, and his wife Margery, despite the fact that the previous Sunday he had warned Pond 'Clerke, if thou here after gevist not me the pax first I shall breke it on thy hedd.' (Duffy 126-27)

There is also no question that such earthly schism provoked ecclesiastical ritual response: men and women who obviously bore a grudge against their neighbours, and even those who had failed to pay their parish dues, were denied Easter communion both to signify and to bring about their temporary expulsion from the body of believers. Exclusion could be a powerful impetus to conform, and so could be and was often used as a forceful threat. In 1529, in the parish of St. Mary Queenhithe, Joanna Carpenter seized the arm of her neighbour "with whom she was at odds" as the latter knelt to receive her Easter communion. "I pray you let me speke a worde with you," Joanna demanded, "for you have need to axe me forgyvenes, before you rescyve your rights" (qtd. in Duffy 95).

However, on occasion, the Host took matters into its own hands, provoked into heavenly response by earthly schism. On those occasions, the import and outcome of its actions had little to do with human-controlled ritual or with modern critics' notions of the corpus Christi as complete and incorrupt. The Host did not need to be whole in order to produce or reward wholeness, nor did it need to present the body politic with an ideal in order to enforce unity -- sometimes it chose to enforce it by reflecting the disjointed or incomplete nature of the state. In some cases where the Mass was celebrated unworthily, the Host disappeared or turned black (Ward 16); in other cases, it was said to lodge itself in the throats of undeserving celebrants, refusing to be incorporated by and therefore to incorporate those individuals:

> One much repeated exemplum told of a rich woman with a grudge against a poor neighbour, forced to reconciliation at Easter by the parson, who threatened that unless she 'forgeve the pore woman here trespasse' he would 'with-drawe fro hure here ryghtes that day': the wealthy woman dissembles forgiveness, and is choked by the Host. (Duffy 95)

At other times the transubstantiated Host appeared "either as a beautiful boy, or as a child pierced and wounded;" sometimes "in the place of bread and wine, there appeared flesh and blood;" and sometimes "the figure of Christ crucified appeared at the consecration, with blood flowing from his wounds into the chalice" (Ward 15-16). These visions of Christ intact or pierced, whole or chopped into innumerable pieces, were described almost interchangeably as rewards for remarkable faith or punishments for remarkable disbelief. Schism could therefore provoke the appearance of Christ's whole, suffocating body as well as that of his torn, horrifying, accusing flesh; similarly and in contrast, concord and unity could be rewarded by the appearance of Christ's whole and beautiful body or by that of Christ's torn, suffering, merciful flesh. Neither ritual nor circumstance could guarantee the type or outcome of any particular miracle. The Host was as adaptable, as unfinished, and on occasion as uncontrollable as the Church.

It was also considered to be as vulnerable. Because the Host was a manifestation of Christ's true body on earth, it was as susceptible to pain and torture as was his historical body, and so Host desecrations were frequently described as new painful "passions." Even Christ's glorified "heavenly" body was considered open to attack: it was believed that Christ was continually wounded by human curses from the time of the historical Passion right up to the Last Judgement. This theme frequently appeared in sermons and was "often illustrated in wall-paintings and glass, in which Christ's bleeding and dismembered body is surrounded by the figures of people who have sworn by the afflicted part" (Duffy 72). In the Chester Last Judgement, Christ tells audience members that his apparent wholeness is nothing but illusion:

> I am not as I feele...
> For my bodye ys all torent
> with othes false alwayes fervent;
> noe lymme on mee but yt is lent [present]
> from head right to the heele. (416-20)[50]

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[50] See Lumiansky and Mill's note to the lines for additional references on the subject of oaths and the wounding of Christ's body. See also the Towneley Judgement, 406-411, where Titivillus tells his fellow demons that those who swear false oaths must come to hell because "In sweryng thai grefe Godys son / And pyne hym more and more . . . ."

This might explain in part the multiplication of Christ's wounds from the standard five to those numbering in the thousands.[51] However, it does so only in part; other scourges of Christ's contemporary body could be and often were identified -- rebaptism, for example.[52]

In any case, Christ's body was represented as neither whole nor complete, neither helplessly subject to the actions of men nor immune from them. In the words of Miri Rubin, it shared with human (as well as social) bodies a distinct "physical liquidity . . . [a] vulnerability and pliability" ("The Body" 20). The body was a source of possibilities; even though "For social peace and order, for the sake of law and liturgy, a single [and *whole*] person had to emerge . . . the body retained its messy secrets" (21). As the Chester Last Judgement reveals, Christ is both apparently intact and completely torn apart, is both glorified and "messy." The "inherent disorder" the corpus Christi shared with human and social *corpora* certainly "called for practical efforts at control in the pursuit of safety and respect" (Rubin 26). Nonetheless, "there was an ontological awareness that these [controls] were social conventions masking far more powerful, and threatening, states of being untouched by the ordering power of institutions . . ." (26). The Host, which appeared so clean and whole, could reveal itself at any moment to be flesh and blood; Christ, long since risen from the dead retained his human, bleeding and suffering body. For Christ as well as for man, completion and wholeness was nothing more than the future promise of the perfect body that every blessed human being (and society as a whole) would assume at the day of Judgement.

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[51] In the Towneley Resurrection, Christ's wounds are numbered at "Four hundreth . . . and v thowsand" (292); in the *Charter of Christ*, this number is increased by sixty. The latter is quoted in part in Miri Rubin, "The Body Whole and Vulnerable" (22).

[52] On 17 January 1525, Zwingli was summoned before the Zurich council to defend his rejection of infant baptism. Not surprisingly, his beliefs were condemned as heretical: the council maintained that baptism should be given to children and that on no account were adults to be baptized a second time. As Heinrich Bullinger recounts, it was decided that those "who are rebaptized . . . crucify Christ anew -- either because of stubbornness or innovation" ("A History of the Reformation," Zuck 65-66).

As a symbol of that future promise, the Host appeared a strange, liminal thing. Tertullian, Ireneus, and Cyril all agreed that "the proof of our final incorruption lies in our eating of God"--as Bynum summarizes the argument, "we are what we eat . . . . we become Christ by consuming Christ, but Christ can never be consumed" (*Resurrection* 39). By digesting God, they reasoned, humans "become indigestible to death" (80), and so each and every Communion becomes a guarantee "that our consumption by beasts or fire or by the gaping maw of the grave is *not* destruction" (39). However, despite these grand notions, great care was taken by parish priests to protect the "indigestible" Host from the voracious appetites of lesser animals, for if the Eucharist was to reassure men and women that they could never really be devoured by beasts or the grave, it could not itself be devoured by church mice.[53] Similarly, great claims were made for the benefits of hearing and seeing the Mass performed daily, benefits mainly but not exclusively pertaining to the health of the body. One medieval verse promises those who have attended Mass:

> Thy fote that day shall not the fayll;
> Thyn eyen from ther syght shall not blynd . . . .
> Thyn age at messe shall not encrease;
> Nor sodeyn deth that day shall not the spill. (qtd. in Duffy 100)

The charm is not completely infallible, however. The song promises protection from death and disease but allows that the unforeseen may and will on occasion occur: "And without hostill [housel] yf thou hap to dissease, / It [the spectator's vision of the Host] shall stond therfore . . ." (100). Nothing can be certain in this life, before the end of time -- not even the power and health of Christ's body.

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[53] See John Myrc's *Instructions for Parish Priests*:

> ȝet when þou art to chyrche I-went,
> Do vp so that sacrament
> Þat hyt be syker in vche way,
> Þat no best hyt towche may.
> ȝef hyt [were] eten wyth mows or rat,
> Dere þow moste a-bygge þat;
> Fowrty dayes for þat myschawnce
> Þow schalt be in penaunce. (2005-12)

4. The Medieval Body Politic and the Plague

The primary cause or reason for this uncertainty and incompletion was (and is) the frailty of human *corpora* (both individual and social) in the face of evil. Primarily encountered and condemned on a Christian by Christian basis, human sin or vice not only affected a person's relationship with his or her fellow believers, but could, in a worst case scenario, manifest itself on a larger scale, infecting the body of an entire community. The language most often used to describe such manifestations, individual and social, was the language of disease. Sins were to the soul and the Christian community what plague was to the body and to the state:

> Þe deuel spredeþ aboute corupte eire of his temptacions of synnes and, whanne men receyuen hem, þan bi processe þei gendren togydere manie foule corupcions of lustus and likyngis þat þei han to þoo synnes. And so, at þe last, of hem groweþ in mannes herte a ful consente, whiche is a foule pestilence boche in þe siȝt of God almyti, and þis is a gret tokene of gostli deþ. But whanne þe blake spottis ben borsten oute (of foule horribile synnes, as pride, wraþ, and enuye, couetise, gloterie) into dede, þanne a man mai haue ful knowyng þat suche a man is at þe deþ. And, in suche pestilence, þe grete hete of þe ague þat þei han smyteþ vp into her heed, and so it makeþ hem raue and speke þanne as wode men. ("Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent," Cigman 19)

"Just as the body has wounds of various kinds, so also the soul has its passions and its wounds," writes Saint Jerome in his forty-ninth homily (1: 361). Like any other disease, sin was thought to follow a course from infection to recovery or death. It had its causes and means of prevention, its symptoms and its cures. "The nature of a wound determines the medication to be applied," Jerome concludes; "we must do penance in proportion to the nature of our sin" (361).

Unfortunately, most of those suffering from diseases of the soul were not quick to recognize or acknowledge their spiritual illness; nor were they easily identified by God-fearing Christians, since their diseased nature did not become obvious until or unless, in the words of the above-cited passage, the black spots of their sins burst out into deed. For practical reasons then, outbreaks of spiritual plague became linked to or associated with outbreaks of physical plague in a perceived cause / effect relationship which persists, in the case of AIDS, to this day (see footnote 2, above). Chaucer sets the events of his Pardoner's tale in a time of pestilence, and this is more than coincidence or literary convention -- physical epidemics were believed to accompany or to answer spiritual epidemics, usually as a punishment for sin. William Edendon, Bishop of Winchester during the first outbreak of the plague in 1348, wrote:

> it is to be feared that the most likely explanation [of the epidemic] is that human sensuality -- the fire which blazed up as a result of Adam's sin and which from adolescence onwards is an incitement to wrong doing -- has now plumbed greater depths of evil, producing a multitude of sins which have provoked the divine anger, by a just judgement, to this revenge. (Horrox 116)

One fourteenth-century, anonymous poem from England laments, "Plague is killing men and beasts . . . Because vices rule unchallenged here" (Horrox 126). Those vices or sinful practices primarily responsible for inciting the pestilence are specifically and variously identified in a number of different sources. According to one author, the plague evinces divine disapproval of tournament playing (Horrox 130); to another, it expresses God's righteous anger at the wearing of indecent clothing (131-134); and to a third, it "most especially" demonstrates heavenly disapproval of the practice of "swearing worthless, deceitful and meaningless oaths" (Horrox 193). The author of an anonymous treatise on the Ten Commandments even suggests that children are struck down by the plague as punishment for breaking the fifth commandment:

> it may be that it is in vengeance of this sin of dishonouring and despising fathers and mothers that God is slaying children by pestilence, as you see daily . . . . unless such rebellious and disobedient children amend during their life, God will smite them with the sword of vengeance in the hour of their death, putting their souls into the pains of hell, and on the last day of judgement he shall put both body and soul into the everlasting pains of hell. (Horrox 134-135)

As the above excerpt suggests, repentance could guarantee plague sufferers a cure for the soul, if not for the body; however, unfortunately, most men and women feared death more than the pains of hell and, instead of making an act of contrition before their untimely deaths, compounded their sins by refusing comfort and charity to their friends, families, and neighbours. "When one person lay sick in a house no one would come near," Gabriele de' Mussis writes of the plague of 1348; "even dear friends would hide themselves away, weeping."

> The physician would not visit. The priest, panic-stricken, administered the sacraments with fear and trembling . . . . And when the sick were in the throes of death, they still called out piteously to their family and neighbours, 'Come here. I'm thirsty, bring me a drink of water. I'm still alive. Don't be frightened. Perhaps I won't die. Please hold me tight, hug my wasted body. You ought to be holding me in your arms.' (Horrox 22)

Husbands abandoned their wives, wives their husbands, parents their children, children their parents, slaves their masters, and masters their slaves, but still the plague did not abate but raged on. As Boccaccio notes in the *Decameron,* those who intentionally and cruelly separated themselves from the plague-stricken suffered exactly the same fate as did those they had shunned. "Some when they were still healthy had set the example of avoiding the sick," he writes, "and, falling ill themselves, died unattended" (4). As in the case of Artaud's "ideal" plague, distance, chastity, and solitude apparently offered no protection to the uninfected.

The reasons for this were two-fold. First of all, bodily disease was simply an outward manifestation of internal evil; since the plague had in essence a spiritual cause, the sufferer had to look within himself or herself to find its hidden source, had to seek out "the boil of his vices" (Horrox 149), or, as one seventeenth-century treatise would later describe it, "the *Plague-sore* of his soul" (Kephale 50). Second, and in no way contrary to the first, bodily plague was long considered to be the instrument of God, a tool, a sword, a dart which he (or an angelic representative) aimed with great precision and manipulated without possibility of mistake. The same seventeenth-century treatise states:

> The simple Plague is the very influence of the striking Angel, executing the vengeance of God on the bodies of men. This kinde of Plague ariseth from no distemper of blood, putrefaction of humours, or influence of Stars, but falleth meerly from the stroke of God's punishing Angel. (Kephale 49)

This image of an avenging celestial being extends back at least to the sixth century. According to Valery Flint, in 590, the Archangel Michael appeared above the city of Rome as Gregory the

Great consecrated to him the Mausoleum of Hadrian. "A terrible plague had ravaged the city," Flint writes, "and Michael was seen to be putting his sword back into its scabbard after it, as though he had presided over it" (164).

Pestilence, as the sword of God (or of his angel), was often heralded as a great leveller. According to Thomas Brooks' *Heavenly Cordial* of 1666, the plague had "an equal aptness to cut down one man as well as another, the rich as well as the poor, the honourable as well as the base, the strong as well as the weak, the Prince as well as the peasant, the Emperour as well as the Carter" (5) -- yet, it was not on that account considered at all random. God chose very carefully those individuals who were to be struck down by the disease:

> God marks out those persons, that he intends to shoot the arrow of pestilence amongst. God never shoots at rovers, he never draws his bow at a venture, but he singles out the persons that he purposes to hit, and his arrows flie swiftly and suddenly, yet they hit none but those that God hath set up as a mark to shoot at . . . . (Brooks 9-10)

For this reason, flight was considered pointless and was denounced as a blatant yet futile rejection of God's will for the individual (Horrox 109). In the fourteenth century, Boccaccio ridiculed those who fled the city of Florence "as if God's wrath in punishing men's wickedness with this plague would not follow them" (4).

Still, because all men and women, good or bad, were affected equally, God's reasons for striking one individual over another had to be various and complicated, and at times appeared almost contradictory. As discussed above, divine punishment played the largest part in any plague visitation, but closely related to this notion was the idea that the plague could incite men and women to spiritual repentance. Thomas Walsingham reports in his *Historia Anglicana* that Scottish raiders, eager to discover why the plague had afflicted the English more than the Scots during the outbreak of 1379, were given the following answer by their proud English victims:

> as one man they doggedly asserted that every disaster, every death, indeed every misfortune which had befallen them, had come to pass through the special grace of God; that it was because of their sins, so that they would atone during this life for the sins which they had already committed, and be deterred from further wrongdoing by the fear of death. (Horrox 90)

Eighteen years earlier, in 1361, John Thoresby, Archbishop of York, expressed much the same sentiment. He writes:

> Almighty God scourges every son he accepts and commonly shows harshness to his people, sending many evil infirmities and sufferings to those who are straying and heaping humiliations on their heads, so that they may repent and seek his name with more humility. (Horrox 119)

The anonymous author of *Historia de Novitatibus Paduae et Lombardiae* further explains: "Almighty God, who does not desire the death of a sinner, but that he may be converted and live, first threatens and secondly strikes to reform the human race, not to destroy it" (Horrox 34).

William Langland's *Piers Plowman* allegorizes this salvic process. In *Passus* 22 of the C-text (20 in B), Conscience calls Nature to send down various ailments from the constellations in the hope that this will draw followers of Antichrist back into Holy Church:

> Kynde [Nature] Consience tho [then] herde and cam oute of the planetes
> And sente forth his forreours [foragers], feueres and fluxes [discharges].
> Cowhes [coughs] and cardiacles [heart diseases], crampes and toeth-aches,
> Reumes and radegroundes [running sores] and roynouse [dirty] scabbes,
> Byles [boils] and boches [tumours] and brennynge aguwes;
> Freneseyes [frenzies] and foule eueles, forageres of Kynde,
> Hadde ypriked and preyed polles [minds; literally, heads] of peple;
> Largeliche a legioun lees the lyf sone. (80-87)

When Nature becomes a bit too enthusiastic in his work, Conscience requests a brief respite, insisting that those men and women who remain alive be given a chance to repent. Nature temporarily stops the carnage to see if anyone will "amende" (109), but, unfortunately, no one does.

Nature's henchman Death eventually strikes down the remaining followers of Antichrist, as he must do all men and women. No one can avoid death forever, and after death there is only reward and punishment -- or possibly, the two in one -- for both believer and unbeliever. The doctrine of Purgatory, first formally defined at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274, made for a kinder (if not gentler) afterlife, giving hope for salvation to all those troubled by petty, venial sins. It also lent fresh significance to martyrdom, the very basis of Christian religion, since persecution on earth for one's faith was considered interchangeable with -- and in the minds of some even more efficacious than -- spiritual purgation after death. Everyone wanted to shorten their time in purgatory since its pains and tortures seemed almost identical to those in hell, but the opportunity for persecution was not always to be found. When one lacked an enemy by whom one might be tortured, one could only punish and debase one's own body through self-mutilation, flagellation, or mortification -- the latter could be a practice as inventive as drinking pus from the sores of the diseased (Bynum, *Fragmentation* 131-32). Like martyrdom, extreme asceticism was *imitatio Christi*, a voluntary participation in all his pain and suffering, and was very nearly as effective a penance. Both martyrs and ascetics were similarly rewarded for their suffering by special gifts of grace -- martyrs often felt no pain over the course of their slow executions, while Angela of Foligno reported that the pus she drank from the scabs of lepers tasted to her "as sweet as communion" (Bynum, *Fragmentation* 132).

To increase their understanding of Christ's suffering even more, ascetics sometimes prayed to be inflicted with, not just to taste, the gift of disease. They wished to follow the example of Job, who in his illness was unsuccessfully tempted by the devil to blaspheme God. Stricken "with a very grievous ulcer" which "spread over his entire body" -- Jerome identifies the disease as leprosy (1: 48; homily 6) -- Job did not give into temptation but continued to love and praise the Lord, and therefore "the evils that befell him worked together for his good" (48), both on earth and in heaven. "Before the time he was tempted," Jerome writes, "God had never spoken to him; after he had been tempted, however, God comes to him and speaks familiarly with him, as a friend with his friend" (48-49). Suffering improved Job's relationship with God while he was still on earth, which was valuable enough in itself; yet, at the same time it improved the prospects of their relationship in the afterlife, since the "vermin of [Job's] body were preparing for him the crown of heaven" (48). Hence one notices a rather ambiguous attitude toward disease.

specifically leprosy, in the Middle Ages. Lepers were at once "an object of admiration and even envy, as well as terror" since they, like Job, "had been granted the special grace of entering upon payment for [their] sins in this life, and could therefore look forward to earlier redemption in the next" (Moore, *Persecuting Society* 60). Because they suffered the pains of Christ on a daily basis, they were referred to (along with hermits and monks) as *pauperes Christi* and were even seen as constituting a "quasi-religious order"(61).

Disease could then be read as reward instead of punishment. Alice of Schaerbeke's biographer in the *Acta Sanctorum* describes how God inflicted her with leprosy in order to prepare her for the most intimate of relationships with Christ her husband:

> as she surpassed in virtues what could be expected from the number of her years, God wished to purge her within . . . because she was his spouse . . . . And so that she would be free to rest with God alone and dally in the cubicle of her mind as in a bridal chamber and be inebriated with the sweetness of his odor . . . he gave her an incurable disease, leprosy. (trans. in Bynum, *Fragmentation* 133)

The disease separated Alice from the rest of her community since no one was willing to be with and comfort her but Christ; it thus liberated her from petty, day-to-day distractions and allowed her to be completely "free to rest with God." In addition, its pains were used to purge those last few sins which remained within her. Part of leprosy's value as a purifier was undoubtedly its lingering nature -- it did not kill its victims immediately, nor did it necessarily even shorten their life spans -- and although the physical pain of leprosy was perhaps not as terrible as that of other diseases, it was far more prolonged (Moore, *Persecuting Society* 61-62).

The plague in contrast condensed a lifetime of suffering into the span of a few days and so derived its value as a purifier from its intensity. Brooks, attempting to explain why both evil and virtuous persons were killed in the London epidemic of 1666, relates the story of a good man infected by the plague in his *Cordial*:

> When [he] lay sick, and his friends asked him how he did, and how he felt himself? he pointed to his sores and ulcers, (whereof he was full) and said, *These are Gods Gems and Jewels, wherewith he decketh his best friends: and to me they are more precious than all the gold and silver in the world.* (15)

This passage seems to suggest that, by the seventeenth century, leprosy and plague were not considered equal in value or efficacy. Leprosy was often described as a living death "because parts broke off the leper's body, because it fragmented and putrefied and became insensate while alive" (Bynum, *Fragmentation* 276); in a sense, the leper was viewed as a walking corpse, a living man or woman already in the process of decay. In contrast, the imagery used in Brooks' (admittedly somewhat late) story of the plague victim suggests that his body was being glorified in the process of dying, was already taking the form of that beautiful and crystalline body with which every Christian expects to be blessed at the Last Judgement. In the Middle Ages, the resurrected body was most commonly described as a "jewel lifted from the mire," "a carbuncle," "a very brilliant precious stone" (Bynum, *Resurrection* 8, 210).[54]

Plague was in many ways especially related to things eschatological. Historically, outbreaks of the disease provoked speculation that the Last Judgement was approaching and, on occasion, inspired mass penitential movements (see Lerner, "Western European Eschatological

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[54] Bynum argues that later medieval (that is, post twelfth-century) notions concerning the resurrected body developed in part from the widespread use of reliquaries -- elaborately decorated containers which held fragments of the bodies of saints. After 1150, these reliquaries took the shape of the body part they contained -- finger, foot, rib -- and were heavily decorated with gold and jewels. These reliquaries, Bynum suggests, were what "theologians, artists, and spiritual writers envisioned when they thought of selves in heaven" (*Resurrection* 200).

Brooks was of course writing for a non-Catholic audience, but there is some evidence that post-Reformation lay-believers continued to think of resurrected bodies as allegorical jewels or gems of unspeakable and unimaginable beauty. In his treatise on the four last things (1633), Robert Bolton writes:

> Mans heart can imagine miraculous admirabilities, rarest peeces, worlds of comforts and strange felicities. In conceipt it can convert all the stones upon earth into pearles, every grasse pile into an unvaluable jewell, the dust into silver, the sea into liquid gold, the aire into crystall. I can clothe the earth with farre more beauty and sweetnesse, than ever the Sun saw it . . . . And yet the height and happiness of Evangelicall wisdome doth farre surpass the utmost which the eare, eye, or heart of man hath heard, seene, or can possible apprehend. And this so excellent light upon earth discovring the inestimable treasures of hidden wisdome in Christ, is but as a graine, to the richest golden mine, a drop to the Ocean, a little glimpse to the glory of the Sun; in respect of that fulness of joy hereafter, and everlasting pleasures above. (qtd. in Watters 41)

Mentalities"). At other times, in the opinions of some, pestilence should have encouraged penitence but did not. For example, in *Piers Plowman*, the plague ravages all those who accept Antichrist's rule; when they are given a brief respite, they do not take advantage of it, do not repent, but immediately resume old sins. The reference is historical, and is an implicit criticism of the English population's response (or lack of it) to the first great plague of 1348-49, after which, as Derek Pearsall notes, "There was, to the disgust of moralists, no general improvement in people's morals" (*Passus* 22, l. 110n.). However, the reference is also eschatological and biblical: when the fourth seal of the Apocalypse is opened, Saint John reports seeing a pale horse and its rider who are "given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth" (Rev. 6.8); the prophets Enoch and Elijah, in the figure of the "two witnesses . . . two olive trees and . . . two lampstands" (Rev. 11.3, 4), are given a similar power, namely the power to turn the waters into blood and "to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire" (Rev. 11.6). On the basis of these passages and on the strength of Catholic tradition, associations of plague and Apocalypse survived even into post-Reformation images of pre-tribulation Rapture. Brooks, again attempting to explain the demise of good Christians because of the plague, compares their deaths to Christ's final rescue of the Church, described in Matthew 24:[55]

> And therefore such and such must fall, when such and such must escape; and such and such must be infected, when such and such are preserved: Hence 'tis that one is taken in the Bed, and the other left; one smitten at the Table, or in the House, and all the rest preserved in perfect health . . . . Of late, many precious servants of Christ are fallen asleep; but who knows what a day of wrath is coming? When a man cuts down his chiefest timber-trees, it is an argument that he intends to part with his land; and how many tall Cedars in this our *Lebanon*, hath God lately cut down . . . . When some fatal judgement hovers like a flying fiery scrole over a Nation, God many times gathers many

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[55] For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. (Matt. 24.37-41)

> of his choice servants unto himself, that he may preserve them from the evil to come. (9: 13-14)

This fear that the plague was a sign of the coming Apocalypse was no doubt heightened by the legal and moral anarchy that outbreaks of the disease accompanied and produced. The reasons for social chaos in times of plague were largely practical. Boccaccio explains:

> In this suffering and misery of our city, the authority of human and divine laws almost disappeared, for, like other men, the ministers and the executors of the laws were all dead or sick or shut up with their families, so that no duties were carried out. Every man was therefore able to do as he pleased. (3)

Even age-old traditions suffered in the wake of disease:

> From sheer necessity . . . several ancient customs were quite altered among the survivors. The custom had been . . . that women relatives and neighbours should gather at the house of the deceased, and there lament with the family. At the same time the men would gather at the door with the male neighbours and other citizens. Then came the clergy, few or many according to the dead person's rank; the coffin was placed on the shoulders of his friends and carried with funeral pomp of lighted candles and dirges to the church which the deceased had chosen before dying. But as the fury of the plague increased, this custom wholly or nearly disappeared, and new customs arose. (4-5)

The uncertainty and lawlessness brought to the state by the plague was at least as terrifying as its physical symptoms. Sufferers found themselves abandoned by those very people to whom they were most strongly bound by familial ties and religious law. More often than not they died alone and unmourned, were buried without benefit of funeral service and, when the cemeteries filled, outside of consecrated ground (5-6). The only possible consolation to victims and survivors alike was the hope, even certainty, that neither the plague nor the chaos that accompanied it could continue forever. Both had to end sometime, and thankfully did: Boccaccio describes the plague's effects only after it has passed, when order has been restored. "The laws are now strict again," he writes, "whereas then, for the reasons already shown, they were very lax . . ." (7).

However, in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, the end of one plague was quickly followed by the start of another. England was troubled with outbreaks in 1361, 1369, 1390, 1407, 1464, and 1479 (Keen 169); in the sixteenth century, according to John Guy, bubonic plague, along with epidemics of pneumonia, smallpox, and the sweat, "created short-term emergencies at least once per decade" (30). Although each plague passed without the apocalypse it promised, apocalyptic imagery was continually used to explain and describe the plague. It seems as though the one could not be endured without the other -- disease could not be accepted without the promise of eternal health, and disorder could not be tolerated (or even enjoyed, as it was by certain ascetics and by Boccaccio's company of three men and seven women) without at least the promise of eternal law.

5. Heresy and Plague

The sins that inspired disease were not just the seven deadly ones -- sometimes pride, wrath, gluttony, covetousness, avarice, lechery, and sloth led members of Christ's Church to err in matters of religious doctrine.[56] From the twelfth century on, these errors and the movements they inspired were regularly sought out and eradicated by Church authorities so that their poisonous teachings would not spread to and "infect" other Christians.

In "Heresy as Disease," R.I. Moore documents the frequency with which medieval commentators referred to heresy as illnesses of various kinds. He finds the word *pestis* used in descriptions "of almost every significant outbreak of heresy in the twelfth century" (2), and notes that heretics are often spoken of as carriers of disease. According to Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologiae*, "pestilence is a contagion which, when it has taken hold of one person, quickly passes on to others;"[57] it is caused by polluted air and infects its victims by sinking into the viscera. "Hence," Moore writes, "Henry of Lausanne left Le Mans 'to infect other regions with his viper's breath,' hence the 'poisonous teaching' which Eckbert of Scönau attributes to Mani, and Cardinal Peter of St. Chrysogonus to the Cathars in Toulouse" (2). Moore notes that in the "comparatively small body of reports of popular heresy in the twelfth century," it was "alleged to 'infect' eight times, and to 'propagate' and 'contaminate' twice each" (2).

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[56] Malcolm Lambert writes in *Medieval Heresy* that the main characteristic "of the type figure of the heretic" was his pride, for he "set himself up against the teaching of the Church" (4). The other deadly sins figured in varying proportions from heresy to heresy: for example, accusations of libertinism (and thus of lechery) were levelled against the Templars, the Cathars, the Waldensians, and the (likely fictional) Adamites and Free Spirits (see Lambert 165, 180; 110-11; 164-66; 336-37; 186-88), while Cathars and Waldensians, accused of usury and of hoarding treasure respectively (110, 165), were denounced as avaricious. It was believed that unorthodox religious doctrines simply justified or exonerated the sinful predilections of a particular heretical group. Thus, the Cathar belief that the individual was liberated from sin and, to a certain extent, freed from conventional morality once he received the *consolamentum*, caused orthodox theologians to speculate that Cathars were unusually licentious people, and that they perhaps used religious doctrine to excuse their "unnatural" sexual perversity (110-111).

As a disease, heresy afflicted not only the bodies of individuals but those of cities and states. Henry of Clairvaux "found the city of Toulouse so infected [with heretical *plaga*] that from the soles of its feet to the top of its head there was scarcely a healthy piece in it" (2); in 1163, the Council of Tours compared the growth and spread of this same heresy to the growth and spread of cancer in the body: "a damned heresy emerged a short while ago in parts of Toulouse which gradually, in the manner of a cancer, spread to neighbouring locations, through Gascogne and other provinces."[58] In *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, William of Newburgh, describing both the invasion of *Publicani* (likely, Cathars) into England in 1161-66 and the swift response it evoked from authorities, contrasted the ease with which the poor simple folk of other countries were infected by the virus of heresy with the vigorous good health enjoyed by the citizens and nation of England. "Countryfolk, uneducated and sluggish of mind, once they are poisoned by a draught of this virus, stubbornly resist all discipline," he writes (Wakefield and Evans 245) -- but not in

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[57] "pestilentia est contagium, quod dum unum adprehenderit celeriter ad plures transit" (qtd. in Moore, "Heresy as Disease" 2).

[58] "in partibus Tolosae damnanda haeresis dudum emersit, quae paulatim more cancri ad vicina loca se diffundens, per Guasconiam et alias provincias . . ." (qtd. in Moore 3).

England. The island state, ever alert, had thus far avoided ingestion of such poisons and infection by such viruses. England "has always been free of this and other heretical pestilences," William was proud to note, "even though many heresies have spread in other parts of the world" (245-46). It had not yet been a source, carrier, nor victim of the plague -- "no poison of . . . heresy ever bubbled up from it, nor, until the time of Henry II, did any such come from abroad to be propagated and extended here" (246). William even ventured to predict that, given the ferocity of the measures taken by authorities to stop the *Publicani*, it was highly unlikely that heretics would attempt to infect or invade the *corpus* of England again in the near or distant future. "[B]y God's help such resistance was offered to the pestilence which crept in that in the future it must fear to invade this island" (246).

Heresy did of course rise up again in England in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries in the form of the Wyclifite (or Lollard) and Protestant movements. In both cases, heresy was again described by its orthodox opponents using the language of sickness and disease. In 1377, Pope Gregory XI, in correspondence with the masters of Oxford, expressed his desire that John Wyclif's erroneous ideas be prevented from spreading:

> we are not willing, nay, indeed, ought not to be willing, that so deadly a pestilence should continue to exist with our connivance, a pestilence which, if it is not opposed in its beginnings, and torn out by the roots in its entirety, will be reached too late by medicines when it has infected very many with its contagion. (Peters 272)

Gregory ordered Wyclif's arrest and, further, ordered that all those similarly "stained with these errors" be removed from their positions at the university (272). Wyclif never was arrested -- two hearings were held in an attempt to silence him (in 1377 and 1378), but he had friends in high places and so both attempts came to nought (Lambert 231). His forced retirement from the university in 1380 simply freed him to write more of the tracts that would inspire England's first popular heretical movement.

As one late fourteenth-century poem laments, England was no longer free from the poison of heresy. "O land newly plague-ridden," it begins, "a short time ago you were giving birth to healthy knowledge, free from the stain of heresy, from every foreign error, from all deceits." "Now, our kingdom," it continues, "you move towards schism, discord, error and madness."[59] Once the last bastion of true faith and knowledge, England now suffered the double shame of being the birthplace of and the only country infected by the new and seemingly incurable disease of Lollardy: according to the poet, "this disease now in England and in no other nation reigns without remedy."[60] He insists that no previous heresy was ever so dangerous, that "no worse disease was ever in the Church, proceeding in such error."[61] Further, he concludes that, because all heretical movements are ultimately allied against the true faith and because the Lollard movement is the most dangerous and perverse of all, the relatively new English heresy has already assumed its rightful place at the head of all others world-wide. Addressing Wyclif, he writes: "You are the false leader of every abominable sect, of every inconstant doctrine."[62]

Wyclif's teaching did influence a number of Continental heretical movements, particularly the Hussites in Bohemia (see Lambert 284-348); nonetheless, the poet's claims were a bit exaggerated. At home, although Wyclifism was fairly popular throughout the first part of the fifteenth century, first among the aristocracy and then among the artisan classes, it became less vocal and lost its revolutionary fire after the failed uprisings of 1381 and 1414 (238). Renewed prosecutions of Lollards in 1486, 1491, 1511-12, and 1521-32, suggest that the movement never actually died out but, having shrunk to a small minority of the country's population, simply went underground (268-69). Since Protestantism from the Continent was present in England by the second decade of the sixteenth century, Wyclifism had "survived to merge with the new Protestantism" (268-69). However, so had the language used to describe Wyclifism, and it was immediately employed to denounce the new Protestant threat. Sir Thomas More, in his *History of the Passion*, writes the following concerning this latest (and as time would prove, most successful) Continental, heretical threat to the Orthodox Church:

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  O terra jam pestifera,
Dudum eras puerpera
  Omnis sanae scientiae;
Haeresis labe libera,
Omni errore extera,
  Exsors omnis fallaciae.
Jam schismatis, discordiae,
Erroris, et insaniae
  Extas noster sceptigera. (Wright 233)

[60] "Haec pestis jam in Anglia, / Et nulla gente alia, / Regnat sine remedio" (Wright 233).

[61] "Nam pejor pestilentia / Non fuit in ecclesia, / Incedens tam erronee" (Wright 232).

[62] "Omnis sectae nefariae, / Omnis doctrinae variae, / Tu es sectatrix perpera" (Wright 233).

> wheresoever this venomous plague reigneth most, it infecteth not all the people at once in one day, but in process of time by little and little increasing more and more, while such persons as at the first beginning can abide no heresy, afterward being content to hear of it, begin less and less to mislike it, and within a while after can endure to give ear to large lewd talk therein, and at length are quite carried away themselves therewith. This disease still creeping, as saith the apostle, forth further like a canker doth in conclusion overrun the whole country altogether. (Basset 78)

He advises all English men and women to pray for the conversion back to the true faith of all those infected with the Protestant heresy and, more importantly, to pray "that God never suffer us to fall into the like temptation, nor the devil ever to raise any such of his tempestuous storms in the coasts where we dwell" (78).

Thus, the association of heresy with disease lasted well into the sixteenth century, and even beyond. The prevalence of the comparison is striking, and is perhaps in part explained by the belief (mentioned above) that individual heresies were members of a larger, world-wide movement against the Church. As early as the fourth century, Saint Ambrose imagined an international conspiracy between Jews, Eunomians, Sabellians, Arians, and followers of Novatus and Donatus. He writes in *De incarnationis dominicae sacramento* (The Sacrament of the Incarnation of Our Lord) that all heresies are Cainites since, "under the name of brotherhood in an unbrotherly fashion [they] persecute the Church [and] . . . under the option of the Christian name and a kind of nominal brotherhood of faith . . . desire to wound us with parricidal swords" (*Theological and Dogmatic Works* 223; ch. 2). In its third canon, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 condemns and excommunicates "every heresy that raises itself against the holy, orthodox, and Catholic faith" (Peters 175); it feels no need to list the names of individual heresies in the condemnation for, "while they have different faces, they are nevertheless bound to each other by their tails, since in all of them vanity is a common element" (175). On the subject of English Lollards, Thomas Netter in his *Doctrinale Fidei Catholicae*[63] concludes that Lollards share a prior founder and even greater master than Wyclif with other heretical groups:

> Many students are gathered together under one master the devil, under whose incitement the Samaritans, the Jews, the Marcions, the Valentinians, the Eunomians, the Vigilantians, and now after them, the stinking Wyclifites, are not able to tolerate the odour of those devoted to the faith.[64]

As in the above examples, Jews were often included in lists of heretical conspirators against the Church, although, technically speaking, they were apostates. Jews and heretics were conflated in practice on the Continent throughout the Middle Ages and in England before the expulsion of 1290 with the introduction of identification badges. As Joshua Trachtenberg notes, with the start of the Inquisition, it became Church policy to distinguish enemies of Christianity by forcing them to display certain marks or distinctive signs on their persons (180). Although these signs varied according to group, they "were often so nearly alike and so clumsily designed (consisting usually of pieces of colored felt sewn on the outer garments) that they could be distinguished from one another only with difficulty, and often not at all" (180). It was therefore "the most natural thing in the world for the Christian populace to associate the two as members of the same fraternity" (181) -- but the reasoning did not stop there. Since the Jews were considered the first sect to break with the Church (by rejecting Christ), it seemed logical that their faith was not just one heresy among many but rather was the source and origin of all heresy, the "root and branch of all dissent" (181); thus,

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[63] This enormous answer to the Lollard movement was written by Netter at the request of Henry V and appeared sometime after 1420-21. Later revived and used as a refutation of Protestantism, it was put into print a number of times: in 1532 (after Luther's great refusal in 1520), in 1556-57, and in 1571. See Mudroch 3, 7, and 21, n. 40.

[64] "Tot sub uno magistro diabolo scholares involvit, cuius instinctu samaritae, Judaei, Marcionistae, Valentiniani, Eunomiani, Vigilantiani, iam post eos foetidi Wiclevistae, odorem devotorum fidelium ferre non possunt . . ." ("De Ecclesiarum Dedicatione," 3: 816). The reference is to 2 Corinthians 2.14-16:

> But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

> the Nestorians were frequently referred to as 'Jews' and the Iconoclastic revolt was directly traced to the influence of Jews . . . . Jews were generally suspected of inspiring the schismatic sects, and the commonest charge against these heresies was that of 'judaizing.' This popular version of the nature of heresy reached its peak during the Hussite wars (1419-36), when Jews were attacked from the pulpit throughout Central Europe as sympathizers and abettors of the militant heretics and suffered widespread persecution on this score. In Vienna . . . the theological faculty took official cognizance in its minutes of 'the alliance of Jews with Hussites and Waldensians . . . .' (175-76)

Even in England, a country supposedly free of the Jewish threat, Sir Thomas More saw evidence of the Jews' influence and example in later heresies:

> the Pharisees, the scribes, and the ancients of the people, that were wholly given to lewd superstitions which they had matched with the law of God, under pretence of holiness labouring to destroy all godly virtue and to rid out of the way the author of true religion, do well signify and represent unto us blasphemous archheretics with their complices, the teachers and ringleaders of devilish superstition. (111)

The only acknowledged difference between heretics and Jews both on the Continent and in England was that "heretics were wrong on some points, whereas the Jews were wrong on all" (Trachtenberg 176).

It is not surprising, then, that like their counterparts Jews were strongly associated with plague and disease. It was believed that Jews suffered "from certain peculiar and secret afflictions" to which Christians were immune -- for example, Jewish men as well as women were believed to menstruate, while the entire race was thought particularly susceptible to "quinsy, scrofula . . . various mysterious skin diseases, and sores that gave forth a malodorous flux" (50). Jews were also a suspected source of plague in Christian communities: not content merely to slay the souls of some by means of heresy, they attempted to kill the bodies of many by means of poison. This poison (in one case said to be compounded out of "Christians' hearts, spiders, frogs, lizards, human flesh, and sacred hosts," 104) could be hidden in "wine, butter, and other foodstuffs" (104), placed in drinking wells, rubbed on the knockers of doors, or even released into the air (106-07). Under torture, suspected poisoners more often than not confessed, and nearly every major epidemic on the Continent of Europe was followed by select executions or mass persecutions of Jews as a result. During the great plague of 1348-49, "Jews throughout the world were reviled and accused in all lands of having caused it through the poison which they are said to have put into the water and the wells . . . and for this reason Jews were burnt all the way from the Mediterranean into Germany . . ." ("About the Great Plague and the Burning of the Jews," Marcus 46; see also Horrox 207-22). The residents of Strasbourg alone slew 16 000 of their Jewish neighbours, accusing them of spreading the Black Death (Garrett 237). And in 1506, the almost-empty (because plague-ridden) town of Lisbon was the site of a three day massacre which left "above two thousand of the Jewish race . . . murdered."[65]

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[65] See Marcus 59. The massacre was not exactly instigated but aggravated by the presence of disease, since anti-Jewish sentiment was running high in the community at the time. A new Jewish convert, doubting a recently proclaimed miracle, made the mistake of publicly declaring his scepticism. As Geronymo Osorio writes in his account of the massacre, "considering the time [of drought, plague, and high prices], place, and congregation, it was highly imprudent for any one, especially a Jew, to endeavor to convince people of a mistake when they were firmly persuaded the thing was true." In a rage, the Christian populace proclaimed the Jew "a perfidious, wicked betrayer of religion and an outrageous and malicious enemy of Christ, and declared him worthy of torture and death." The crowd would perhaps have been satisfied with the death of a single Jew if a number of Dominican monks had not urged them to "Avenge the heresy, and extinguish the wicked race," which they subsequently attempted to do (Marcus 56-59).

The Church did not officially sanction the execution of Jews by secular authorities (or by the general Christian population), but the medical language it used when describing Jews and heretics and when prescribing the means by which the community should be "cured" of them could have encouraged murder, if taken literally. Saint John Chrysostom, in his *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, was one of the first Catholic fathers to advocate the "amputation" and "cauterization" of diseased members (heretics who practised Jewish rites) from the body of Christ, the Church:

> If a catechumen is sick with this disease, let him be kept outside the Church doors. If the sick one be a believer and already initiated, let him be driven from the holy table. For not all sins need exhortation and counsel; some sins, of their very nature, demand cure by a quick and sharp excision. The wounds we can tolerate respond to more gentle cures; those which have festered and cannot be cured, those which are feeding on the rest of the body, need cauterization with a point of steel. So it is with sins. Some need long exhortation; others need sharp rebuke. (45; discourse 2)

In his *Homilies*, Saint Jerome also advocates amputation and cauterization, as well as the painful lancing of wounds, as a cure for sin and heresy:

> If a physician should notice infected and decayed tissue in a body and say, 'What concern is that of mine?' you would conclude rightly that he is cruel; but if he should excise the infected tissues and cauterize the wound, he is compassionate, for he is saving the life of a man . . . . If in the body there is a wound that has become infected and cancerous and is filled with pus, unless it is opened, there is no way of removing the pus. Then, when the pus is discharged, unless the wound is cauterized, it fills up again with poisonous matter. We see now what the psalmist means. Because my tongue is swollen with pus and poison, first wound it with Your arrows that the pus may be released; then apply Your burning coals of fire, so that all the evil in it may be burned out and it may become a desert waste. (1: 369, 309; homilies 51, 41)[66]

In the sixteenth century, Thomas More allowed for the physical "amputation" of heretics from the body of Christ (that is, execution) as well as for their spiritual "amputation" (that is, excommunication). In his opinion, the former was to be preferred as the more merciful course of action, yet he hoped that both types of amputation would be used only in cases of extreme moral and spiritual illness:

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[66] The reference is to Psalm 120 (119 in the Vulgate).3-4: "What shall be given to you? And what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue? A warrior's sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree!"

> by that sword [of excecution], whatsoever evil person is once cast out of the Church, that is to be understanden as a rotten member cut off from my mystical body, is delivered sometime to the devil's hands only to chastise his flesh, to the end his soul may be saved, if so be there remain any hope of amendment in him, and that he may be grafted and knit into my body afresh.
>
> And other whiles if he be so desperately diseased, that he be past all recovery, then for fear the infection of him might haply hurt the whole and sound, is he perpetually condemned unto the invisible death of his soul also. And of truth so loath am I to have ye fight with this temporal sword . . . that I could not advise you to occupy the spiritual sword . . . not very often neither . . . . as for the . . . terrible and dangerous sword of excommunication, that would I have you always keep within the scabbard of mercy and pity, till an urgent and wondrous necessary cause enforce you to draw it out. (104)

Both physical and spiritual swords were rarely in their scabbards, as More was to learn first hand in 1535 when he himself became "an urgent and wondrous necessary cause" and was decapitated.[67] Other heretics were not so fortunate. Most condemned on the Continent by the Inquisition were burned alive; thus diseased members were amputated and the body politic's wounds were cauterized in one fell stroke (see Lea 230-57). After 1401 and the English statute *De haeretico comburendo* (On the Burning of Heretics; see Peters 212-15), Lollards, Protestants, and later even Catholics would be burned at the stake in England as well, but before this more ingenious methods of amputating heretics were employed. In the above-mentioned case of the Publicani, who were "warned that they should repent and be united to the body of the Church" but stubbornly "rejected all wholesome advice" (Wakefield and Evans 246-47), the response of authorities was swift and sure. First "the detestable group were branded on the brows . . . Stripped of their clothing to the waist and publicly flogged with resounding blows;" then "they were driven out of the city, and perished miserably in the bitter cold, for it was winter and no one offered them the slightest pity" (247). Like the biblical scapegoat described in Leviticus 16, the Publicani were labelled unclean and expelled from the Christian community. Their deaths were slow and symbolic.

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[67] More was indicted under the acts of Supremacy (1534) and Treason (1534). His rebellion was more political than religious (he was not defending the supremacy or even primacy of the Pope, which he himself doubted); however, subsequent generations have adopted him as a martyr to the Catholic cause. See Guy 138-41.

Part of the impulse behind these cuts, separations, and cauterizations, was possibly a will to power. Both R.I. Moore (in *Persecuting Society*) and Jeremy Cohen have noted that the way in which heretics and Jews were treated changed drastically after the twelfth century: Jews were increasingly viewed as heretics after the rise of the mendicant orders and heretics were more frequently and aggressively sought out after the rise of the Inquisition. By insisting that Jews were heretics who needed to be brought back into the body of Christ, the mendicants effectively created a role for themselves as missionaries, a role made all the more urgent by the belief that a mass conversion of Jews was to precede the second coming of Christ. Without this conversion, Christ would not come, and so the mendicants' task was a pressing one -- it needed "to be performed in order to pave the way for final redemption" (Cohen 247). Mendicants were also largely responsible for the rise of and operation of the Inquisition. Before the twelfth century, it was a bishop's responsibility to prosecute heretics who appeared in his diocese, but according to Moore, "in recorded instances" bishops only responded to "dramatic and aggressive acts on the part of notorious -- in effect, self-proclaimed -- heretics" (26). In contrast, the Dominicans and Franciscans made it their "business to go looking for heretics on the premise that they were there to be found" (26) and on the premise that they could and often would appear identical to their good, Christian neighbours. The two could only be distinguished by men who understood and therefore could see through the heretic's theatrical powers of deception. In other words, heretics could only be unmasked by learned members of the Church trained to see past their pleasant façades and pious faces.

Of course, the stronger the resemblance between Jews or heretics and Christians, the stronger the authority of those empowered to distinguish between them, and so one notices a marked tendency in accounts of heretical movements to emphasize their feigned piety and penchant to lie under interrogation. This strategic blurring of heretic and Christian was no means the invention of mendicants; the fear of heresy as an invisible threat was fostered in the Church as early as the fourth century, if not earlier.[68] However, the mendicants knew a good thing when they saw one, and perfected the image of the smiling, heretical villain. In the *Liber Augustalis* of Frederick II (1231), Patarines (Italian Cathars) are described as wolves who "pretend the tameness of sheep until they can get inside the sheepfold of the Lord" (Peters 207); they are "serpents who seem to creep in secretly and, under the sweetness of honey, spew out poison" (207). In the anonymous work, "On the Origins of Heresy and the Sect of the Waldensians," Waldensians are identified as a sect most "dangerous to the Church of God" because,

> when other sects generate horror in their audience by the awfulness of their blasphemies about God, these Lyonists have a great appearance of holiness -- before men they live justly and believe properly everything concerning God and all articles that are in the creed -- they blaspheme only the Roman Church and clergy, which it is easy to make laypeople to believe. (Peters 152-53)

David of Augsburg, "a member of the south German Province of the Franciscan order . . . and briefly, an inquisitor"(Peters 149), understood that heretics could even, on occasion, use the words of the Catholic fathers to convert foolish men and women to their faith. He writes: "they pick out the words of Sts. Augustine, Jerome, Gregory, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Isidore, and short passages from their books, in order to prove their illusions and to resist us;" they "very easily lead simple people astray, by dressing up their sacrilegious doctrine with fair passages from the saints" (Peters 150). Even Bernard Gui, perhaps the most famous inquisitor of all, "recognized" and recorded the techniques used by some heretics under interrogation to avoid punishment by making their beliefs appear orthodox:

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[68] Chrysostom considered the Jewish temple a greater threat than the pagan temple because of its close resemblance to the Church:

> In the pagan temple the impiety is naked and obvious; hence, it would not be easy to deceive a man of sound and prudent mind or entice him to go there. But in the synagogue there are men who say they worship God and abhor idols, men who say they have prophets and pay them honor. But by their words they make ready an abundance of bait to catch in their nets the simpler souls who are so foolish as to be caught off guard. (*Discourses* 23; discourse 1)

> The inquisitor questions his suspect on the articles of faith. He replies briskly, 'I firmly believe.' The inquisitor asks him about transubstantiation. He replies, 'Ought I not to believe this?' The inquisitor responds, 'I am not asking if you ought to believe it, but if in fact you do,' and gets in turn the reply, 'I believe all that you and other good doctors order me to believe.' The inquisitor believes this is an evasion, and goes on . . . . (Lambert 178)[69]

As Malcolm Lambert notes, this scenario probably did play out -- heretics probably did try to equivocate to save themselves and friends, while simple Catholics, by "nervously attempting to ingratiate themselves" with their examiners, probably condemned themselves and others to death. Inquisitors often jumped to conclusions and were generally "inclined to think that suspects were more subtle than they really were" (178).

They certainly believed that the more pious a heretic appeared in public, the more hideous his crimes had to be in private. Dualist heretics who were celibate and refused to eat anything produced through sexual reproduction were accused of participating in outrageous midnight orgies; they supposedly killed the children produced in the course of these meetings shortly after birth, burned their flesh to ashes, and baked those ashes into the bread consumed at their black masses (Lambert 9-16, 166).[70] An outwardly pious community of beguines at Schedweidnitz examined by the Dominican inquisitor John Schwenkenfeld in 1332 was accused of being "a nest of perverts" behind closed doors (Lerner, *Heresy of the Free Spirit* 119). Although the women were ascetics and practiced extreme acts of mortification bordering on self-torture, they were accused of being sensualists and of indulging in sexual liberties. Novices offered tales (all second hand) of "orgies and obscene caresses in church" (117), of late-night meetings with the beguines' male counterparts, the beghards. Some stories were likely true: one novice "claimed that a beghard told her when they were alone that to resist or to have shame at sexual contact was a sign of grossness of spirit but that she could have the greatest spirituality if she exhibited herself to a man" (118). Molestations could have occurred in isolated cases and some individuals undoubtedly abused their authority. However, other stories were almost certainly not true: another novice claimed "somewhat paranoically [that] the beghards drove her away when they wished to confer with other women in the house" (118). As Robert Lerner notes, the "fact that the house was not a clandestine community" makes this accusation quite doubtful, as does the fact that the house had existed for twenty-six years without earning the disrespect and suspicion of the citizens of Schedweidnitz (119).

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[69] This is Lambert's summary of a passage from Gui's *Practica Inquisitionis* (Manual for Inquisitors). For an English translation of the complete work, see Wakefield and Evans 373-445.

[70] Those who accused Cathars and other dualist sects of participating in various kinds of black masses were operating on the assumption that they were the progeny of Augustine's Manichees. In chapter forty-six of his *Concerning Heresies*, Augustine gives what was to become an important prototype for future representations of Eucharistic sacrilege:

> Then with difficulty he [Ursus the tribune] compelled Eusebia, some kind of Manichaean nun, to admit that she had undergone the same treatment in this regard, though at first, she maintained that she was a virgin and insisted on being examined by a midwife. When she was examined and when her true condition was discovered, she likewise gave information on that whole loathsome business at which flour is sprinkled beneath a couple in sexual intercourse to receive and commingle with their seed [the flour is then used to bake bread] . . . . One of them, whose name is Viator, claimed that those who commit such acts are properly called Catharists. (Peters 35)

In many other cases, heretics were, far from objects of suspicion, regarded as important and respected members of the community. Waldensians were admired for their simple piety; beguines operated community schools; Cathars in France were referred to as "Bonhommes" and were "even credited with beneficent supernatural power to avert storms and lightening and other calamities" (Trachtenberg 200). While preaching against Cathars in the south of France, Brother Berthold of Regensburg was posed the following urgent question by a concerned member of the crowd: "Brother Berthold, how shall we guard ourselves against them, when they are so very similar to good folk?" (200). Anxiety began to run high, for not only were heretics similar to good folk, they were good folk -- one minute important, healthy members of the community, the next, discarded, diseased limbs. The body of believers (like the fleshly body of the individual and even of Christ) was a site of infinite, terrible possibilities where no one was safe, where anyone could be infected and suddenly begin to rot.

Heretics could be any- and everywhere. They needed to be expelled from the body because they respected no boundaries: although enemies of the faith, they operated within the faith and fed off the body much like a parasite. The language used to describe them is quite consistent. For example, they are weeds in a healthy garden -- Gregory XI admonishes the masters of Oxford for allowing "tares to spring up amidst the pure wheat in the fields of your glorious university" (Peters 271), while the author of "Against the Lollards" denounces all heretical English dissenters as "tares, thorns, thorn bushes and also darnel, which lay waste to the vineyard."[71] Tertullian writes that heretics are sickly sheep who, if not cured or separated, will infect the entire flock, or are hungry wolves within the fold, waiting to carry off and devour weaker members:

> The Lord teaches us that many 'ravening wolves shall come in sheep's clothing.' Now, what are these sheep's clothings, but the external surface of the Christian profession? Who are the ravening wolves but those deceitful senses and spirits which are lurking within to waste the flock of Christ? . . . Who are the false apostles but the preachers of a spurious gospel? (*Prescription against Heretics* 245; ch. 4)

Schismatics are also likened to vipers or stinging insects which are hidden in the garden of the Church, ready to strike and even consume unwary Christians. In *Scorpiace*, Tertullian compares those heretics who oppose martyrdom to scorpions, while the author of "Against the Lollards" prayerfully requests that Christ "wound the viper with the hoe of health, that, rising up, he may not injure." "Make it so that he may not rise to fame," the poet entreats, "and that he may nowhere devour his offspring, as he creeps along concealed."[72] Further, heretics are described as cowards with no respect for the rites and customs of war. In Prudentius' fourth-century *Psychomachia* (Spiritual Combat), Discord or Heresy enters into the Virtues' ranks "as a friend" and, before detection, manages to stab Christian Concord through a seam in her chainmail (pp. 102-03, ll. 665-714).

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[71] "Lollardi sunt zizania, / Spinae, vepres, ac lollia, / Quae vastant hortum vineae" (Wright 232).

[72]
Secat salutis sarculo
  Veprem, ne crescens noceat.
Fac quod non emineat,
Et quod nusquam absorbeat
  Semen, cum serpit clanculo. (Wright 231)

This ostensible disrespect for and consequent ability to disrupt boundaries was reflected on and in the bodies of Jews and heretics. When discovered, members of both groups were subjected to horrendous methods of torture and execution, often resulting in the complete fragmentation of their bodies. Death by fire and the scattering of one's ashes was standard punishment, but Jews and heretics could also be drawn and quartered or be left for dead after having their limbs broken on the wheel (Hsia 24-25). In the *Psychomachia*, Discord or Heresy is torn limb from limb as fitting punishment for penetrating the Virtues' defences:

> Hands without number rend the deadly beast;
> Each one takes for herself a piece to fling
> Into the air, or give to dogs, or throw
> To carrion crows, or into sewers cast,
> Or to the monsters of the sea consign.
> The whole corpse torn to bits is thrown to beasts;
> Thus Heresy perishes, all her members rent. (p. 104, ll. 719-25)

Even when not discovered and forcibly dismembered in this way, the bodies of Jews and heretics were considered inherently liminal things. Jews were supposedly afflicted by curious discharges -- menstrual blood, foul-smelling pus -- as well as grotesque diseases of the skin. The heretic's *cancer* was not the disease we know today, but referred in general to sores, ulcers, tumours, and scabs found on the surface of the body (Moore, "Heresy as Disease" 3); it could signify diseases as various and as serious as "erysipelas, elephantiasis, syphilis and leprosy" (3). The Jew's and heretic's internal bodies were, in a sense, slowly leaking out, were imperfectly contained by the disintegrating boundary of their skins. On occasion, slow leaks could become torrents, and so heretics were sometimes described as vomiting out their perverse doctrines. Discussing those schismatics who believed that the flesh and divinity of Christ were of one nature, Ambrose wonders, "What infernal places have vomited so great a sacrilege?" (*De incarnatione* in *Theological and Dogmatic Works* 237; ch. 6). Tertullian writes that the understanding of the individual infected with heretical poison immediately "seeks for itself a place where it may throw up" (*Scorpiace* 634; ch. 1); Gregory XI laments that Wyclif "has fallen into such a detestable madness that he does not hesitate to dogmatize and publicly preach, or rather vomit forth from the recesses of his breast certain propositions and conclusions which are erroneous and false" (Peters 271). And in the poem, "Against the Lollards," Wyclif is described as "foaming heavily at the mouth with envy" while he spreads his heretical doctrines like seeds from a sack; similarly, his followers "under the appearance of holiness" are said to "vomit malicious poison at all who hear them."[73]

The heretic's mouth was always open, ready to expel or, alternately, to ingest poison and ready to swallow his unwary neighbour at a moment's notice. Rainerius Sacchoni, in his *Summa de Catharis*, accused heretics of drinking "the poison of their error from the mouth of the ancient serpent,"[74] while Jerome warned Christians that the heretic's mouth was an open grave capable of consuming them whole:

> Heretics are unhappy men; they are whited sepulchres, full of dead men's bones . . . . Arius, Eunomius, and other heretics have tongues like arrows, jaws like empty tombs. 'Their throat is an open grave.' 'Open' is well said, for whenever anyone has been deceived enough to enter that tomb, the heretic is ready and draws him right in. The mouths of heretics are forever gaping. (1: 20; homily 2)

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[73] Auctor omnis periculi,
  Gravi spumans invidia,
In humo hujus hortuli
De fundo sui sacculi
  Modo jecit zizania.
. . . .
Sub sanctitatis specie
Virus vomunt [i.e. lollardi] malitiae,
  Cunctis qui ipsos audiunt. (Wright 232).

[74] "erroris . . . venenum . . . ex ore antiqui serpentis" (qtd. in Moore, "Heresy as Disease" 2).

Like the Jew, the heretic continually hungers and is never satisfied by what he consumes, both because he is unable to incorporate the food he has eaten (he vomits it out again) and because *what* he chooses to eat is in itself empty and unwholesome. The voracious, vomiting heretic is a parody of the Christian who consumes the body of Christ and is himself consumed by it, once and for all -- "The Jew drinks [water] and is thirsty," Ambrose writes in *De mysteriis* (The Mysteries), but "when you drink [Christ's blood], you will not be able to be thirsty" (*Theological and Dogmatic Works* 23; ch. 8). The Jew or heretic is also no better than the vomit he expels. As Honorius writes in his *Elucidarium*, heretics are a "burden [to] the stomach [*ventrum*] of mother church," are "effluvia and excrement," "snot," food for demons, and "shit for the stomach of pigs" (trans. in Bynum, *Resurrection* 148).

As revolting as this sounds, the heretic or Jew was nonetheless a necessary evil, one that played a vital role in the constitution of the Church. Critics such as Jonathan Dollimore have recently pointed out that parody or theatrical simulation to a certain extent strengthens the subject threatened by parody; no cohesive image or idea of the Christian can exist without an image or idea of the heretic or Jew, since "instabilities and contradictions within dominant structures . . . exist by virtue of exactly what those structures simultaneously contain and exclude" (33). Like Saussure's signifier, which gains its identity from slight differences in sound or appearance from other signifiers in the horizontal chain of language -- the sound or written word "dog" differs slightly from the signifiers "log," "cog," or even "god" -- the individual or social group seems to be defined by what he or she or it "is not." In other words, as Tertullian writes in his *Prescription against Heretics*, the unorthodox believer, "by affording a trial to faith . . . [gives] it also the opportunity of being 'approved'" (243; ch. 1).

This of course does not mean that heretics were tolerated. Although they were necessary, strengthening the faith of believers by putting it to the test, their intention was to do the very opposite, to corrupt faith, and so had to be punished accordingly.[75] Identified and unmasked by sharp-eyed examiners, expelled from the body of Christ as vomit, amputated from its trunk as a diseased limb might be, quarantined from the healthy flock to prevent the spread of infection, the lurking heretic justified the inquisitorial machine designed to combat him, and, through his movement or separation from the body of Christ, gave rise to the illusion of its wholeness. William of Newburgh was so enamoured of the "pious harshness" with which the Publicani were treated that he proclaimed England healthy, "purged," and rashly predicted that no heresy would ever again trouble the island.

Movement was used to created the illusion of stasis, but the removal of so many tumours and the amputation of so many limbs had to leave scars if not open wounds. As discussed above in the section on the corpus Christi, Christ's body the Church was described as incorporating members through breaches in his / its own skin, particularly through the side wound. Julian of Norwich writes:

> Than with a glad chere our Lord loked into His syde and beheld, enjoyand; and with His swete lokyng He led forth the understondyng of His creture be the same wound into Hys syde withinne. And than He shewid a faire, delectabil place and large enow for al mankynd that shal be save to resten in pece and in love. (p. 69, ll. 863-67; ch. 24)

In books and paintings, Christ bleeds copiously and inexhaustibly -- a fountain springs from his side to fill communal cups (see Bynum, *Fragmentation* 111), and on occasion he is shown sweating blood from every pore in his skin.[76] Sometimes he pulls a Host from an unusually high side wound in his breast; sometimes he displays this same wound to the viewer in juxtaposition with the virgin mother, who simultaneously displays and offers her nourishing, lactating breast (Bynum, *Fragmentation* 110, 113, 115). In the seventeenth chapter of her *Shewings*, Julian of Norwich describes Christ's flesh drained of all blood and moisture: "The skynne of the flesh that semyd of the face and of the body was smal, ronkyllid, with a tannyd colour lyke to a dry borde what it is akynned [scorched], and the face more browne than the body" (p. 61, ll. 639-42). Christ thirsts, not for water, but for the reincorporation of all his members into the one body: "For this is the gostly thrist of Criste, the luf longyng that lestith and ever shal til we se that syte on Domys Day" (p. 76, ll. 1036-37; ch. 31). Christ bleeds and lactates, thirsts and ingests as well as vomits and expels. Things go in and things go out. Christ's skin is already so perforated that the wounds and scars left by subsequent amputations make no difference at all.

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[75] Aquinas writes:

> The profit that ensues from heresy is beside the intention of heretics, for it consists in the constancy of the faithful being put to the text . . . . What they really intend is the corruption of the faith, which is to inflict very great harm indeed. Consequently we should consider what they directly intend, and expel them, rather than what is beside their intention, and so, tolerate them. (1227; pt. 2.2., q. 11, art. 3)

[76] The most famous example is Grünewald's *Crucifixion* from the Isenheim Altarpiece (1510-15).

In many ways, Christ's body is as porous and as unstable as is that of the Jew or heretic. Female mystics seem to have felt a particular affinity with Christ's body because it was in a constant state of flux, as were their own bodies: Christ's bleeding, which purged the world of sin, was compared to a woman's menstrual bleeding, which purged the body of excess nutrition.[77] This association was a positive one, although some (men) in authority suspected it was not quite appropriate (Bynum, *Fragmentation* 215). Church leaders were much less suspicious of the menstruating Jew's association with the bleeding body of Christ. This relationship was a thoroughly negative one, based solely on cause and effect:

> during four days annually bloody wounds appear on the hands and feet of descendants of the tribe of Simeon, because their ancestors struck Jesus while he hung on the cross . . . . because Zebulon threw lots for Jesus' cloak, annually on March 25 they suffer from open wounds in the mouth and spit blood; the tribe of Issachar, who bound Jesus to the post and whipped him, break out with bloody weals and incurable wounds all over the body on the same day; Dan it was that cried out 'Let his blood be on us and on our children,' and therefore every month bloody sores open on their bodies, and they stink so badly they must hide . . . . Gad wove the crown of thorns from fifteen branches and pressed it on Jesus' head until it penetrated the flesh, therefore annually fifteen painful bleeding bruises appear on their heads and necks. (Trachtenberg 51)

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[77] See Bynum, *Fragmentation* 100, 215; Laqueur, *Making Sex* 35-37; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* 19.

These wounds suffered by the Jews superficially resemble the stigmata suffered by the likes of Francis of Assisi, although the former were inflicted as punishment for an appalling lack of faith, and the latter, as a reward for its overabundance. Christ, women, Jews, heretics, and saints all resembled one another in their permeability and instability, yet were fundamentally and profoundly differentiated.

John Chrysostom contrasts martyrs and criminals in his *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*. He admits that both suffer similar fates, but points out that they do so for very different reasons:

> It is true that highwaymen, grave-robbers, and sorcerers have their sides torn to pieces; it is also true that the martyrs undergo this same suffering. What is done is the same, but the purpose and reason why it is done is different. And so it is that there is a great difference between the criminals and martyrs.
>
> In these cases, we not only consider the torture but we first look for the intention and the reasons why the torture is inflicted. And this is why we love the martyrs -- not because they are tortured but because they are tortured for the sake of Christ. But we turn our backs on the robbers -- not because they are being punished but because they are being punished for their wickedness. (77; discourse 4)

Occasionally heretics claimed to be martyrs simply because they met similar ends:

> They laughed at threats uttered in all piety against them . . . and misapplied the word of the Lord, 'Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Thereupon, the bishops . . . publicly denounced them as heretics and handed them over to His Catholic Highness for corporal punishment. He commanded that the brand of heretical infamy be burned on their brows, that they be flogged in the presence of the people, and that they be driven out of the city . . . . When the sentence had been declared, they were led away, rejoicing in their just punishment, their master leading them jauntily and chanting, 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you.' To such an extent did the deceiver abuse the minds of those he had seduced! (William of Newburgh in Wakefield and Evans 247)

And sometimes the accused even suggested that Church authorities, and not they, were invisible heretics, were fraudulent persecutors of innocent Christians:

> The heretics answered, that the bishop who had given sentence was a heretic and not they; and that he was their enemy, and was a ravening wolf, and a hypocrite, and an enemy of God, and had not judged rightly; and they would not answer concerning their faith, because they were aware of him, as the Lord had commanded them in the Gospels. 'Beware of false prophets who come unto you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves . . . .' ("Standoff at Lombers, 1165," Peters 119)

Heretics and Jews were often so convincing in their portrayal of good Christians that they brought the orthodoxy of every believer into question -- even that of those Church authorities who so successfully made the enemies of Christ resemble Christ and his followers. Bishops and inquisitors necessarily put themselves under suspicion of heresy. That was the cost of their bid for power.

6. Theatre, Plague, Heresy, and Authority

In response, Church authorities became as concerned to punish heretics for their apparent or feigned orthodoxy as they were to prevent them from holding and spreading false beliefs. By indoctrinating others, heretics simply added to the quantity of effluvia streaming from the Church as the corpus Christi, but by simulating piety, they troubled the distinction between Christ's body and its various excretions. As parody, heretics threatened (even as they strengthened) the identity of all orthodox Christian believers. As near perfect simulations, they called into question the difference between personhood and impersonation, the difference between truth and its falsification.

The plague of heresy therefore constituted a type of theatre. Coincidentally, the theatre was considered by many of the early Church Fathers, by the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antitheatricalists who borrowed their arguments, and by the only known medieval commentator on English "Miraclis Pleyinge," to be a type of heretical plague. As Jonas Barish points out in his book, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, a single negative medieval commentary on the subject of drama cannot be taken as evidence of an continuous, untroubled, tradition of hostility toward the theatre extending from patristic sources into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (66-67). Indeed, the elision of religion and drama in the English biblical and morality plays at first glance seems to indicate, as Barish argues, that drama enjoyed a brief respite during the Middle Ages from an otherwise historically relentless antitheatrical social bias. If this was actually the case (we have no orthodox tracts to contradict or support this argument), this respite or truce between religion, morality, and theatre must have been an uneasy one. Given the weighty and uncompromising arguments made against the theatre by such authorities as Augustine, Tertullian, and Salvian, and the vehemence with which late sixteenth-century antitheatricalists attacked the drama (at the very time when the cycles themselves were being put down[78]), it seems likely that medieval readings of and attitudes toward the theatre were far from uncomplicated. While it is true that civic religious drama in England was produced with the Church's blessing, the Church apparently recognized that theatrical playing was in flagrant disobedience of the Church Fathers since it discouraged members of the clergy from participating as either actors or spectators in dramatic performances.[79] This double standard for laity and clergy must have made for considerable tension even in the (as Barish paints it) theatrically tolerant Middle Ages, a tension perhaps reflected in post-reformation tracts against the drama. Since we can never know for sure the degree of pro- or antitheatrical feeling present in medieval society due to the absence of contemporary sources, any discussion of attitudes toward drama in England in the Middle Ages will of necessity be a-historical and merely speculative -- as is the discussion that follows.

It has already been mentioned that Augustine contrasted theatre, the plague of the soul, with its less dangerous counterpart, the plague of the body. Citing this passage from *De Civitate Dei* many centuries later, John Northbrooke, in his *Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and*

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[78] York's cycle was last performed on Whit Tuesday, 1569, and the Chester plays were last produced in 1575. Corpus Christi drama in other communities ended at about the same time: c. 1559 in Worchester, in 1564 in Norwich, in 1568 in New Romney, c. 1576 in Doncaster, and in 1580 in Coventry. See Gardiner, *Mysteries' End* 92.

[79] See Marianne Briscoe, "Some Clerical Notions of Dramatic Decorum in Late Medieval England."

Interludes (1577), accuses actors of being a "noysome . . . pestilence to infect a common wealth" (97); citing decrees made under Constantine, he gathers "all . . . players, heretikes, Jews, and pagans" under the title of "infamous persons" (98), and describes how actors were formerly excluded from Communion (97). He complains that many English citizens are now infected with "diseases, either of dice-playing, dauncing, or vain playes or enterludes" (3), and that other citizens, fellow members of Christ's body the Church, do nothing to help and "succour" these sickly members. He concludes that any man who "shall espy forth any thing that may conduce and benefite the mystical bodie, and doeth not his endeauour to the uttermost to bring the same thereunto, verily . . . is to be thought an vnprofitable member, not worthy . . . to be accounted of that number of whom Iesus Christ is the head" (4). For this reason, he writes, he has decided to compose "this little treatise," "giuing herein medicines and remedies against these diseases" (4), assuring his place within Christ's body by doing his part to keep it strong and healthy. He promises his readers that, although the medicine may taste bitter, it will restore them to health: "Although in the first it seeme not toothsome, yet I dare avouch it is holesome" (4). Should this particular, rather gentle therapy be ineffective, however, a more radical, more bitter, course of treatment is available, as Stephen Gosson writes in his *School of Abuses* (1579):

> A good physition, when the disease cannot be cured within, thrusteth the corruption out in the face, and delivereth his patient to the chirurgion . . . . I have some experience in these maladies, which I thrust out with my penne to every mans view, yeelding the ranke fleshe to the chirurgions knife, and so ridde my handes of the cure, for it passeth my cunning to heale them privily. (4)

Those infected with the theatre had to be cut away from the Church as diseased limbs, as "ranke fleshe," in much the same way as heretics and Jews were. This is because, according to both patristic and late sixteenth-century authorities, those who frequented the theatre were heretics and apostates, worshippers of the devil. In *De Spectaculis*, Tertullian refers to the theatre as "the shrine of Venus" (257; ch. 10), while John Chrysostom denounces stage plays as "The Devils Solemnities or Pomps; Satanical Fables, Diabolical Mysteries, the impure Food of Devils, Hellish

Conventicles."[80] In his seventh homily on the Gospel of Saint Matthew, Chrysostom further warns his congregation: "if you continue in the same courses, I will make the knife sharper and the cut deeper; and I will not cease, till I have scattered the theater of the devil, and so purified the assembly of the Church" (50). Salvian, the fifth-century Bishop of Marcelles, in a passage from *The Governance of God*, writes that by frequenting playhouses, his Christian contemporaries were in very real danger of falling into an "apostasy from the faith"

> and a deadly deviation from the Creed and from the heavenly pledges. For, what is the first confession of faith of Christians in the saving baptism? What is it except that they profess they are renouncing the devil, his pomps and games and works . . . . You have once renounced the devil and his games. You must know that when you return to the games you are returning knowingly and deliberately to the devil. (161-62; bk. 6)

John Northbrooke writes: "Satan hath not a more speedie way, and fitter schoole to work and teach his desire, to bring men and women into his snare of concupiscence and filthie lustes of wicked whoredome, than those places, and playes, and theatres are" (85-86). Not to be outdone, Phillip Stubbes (writing in 1583) accuses stage plays of being "quite contrarie to the Word of grace," of having "sucked out of the Deuills teates, to nourish [spectators] in ydolatrie hethenrie, and sinne" (L6). Audience members, he writes, go to the theatre as to "sathans synagogue," "to worship deuils, & betray Christ Jesus" (L7).

The Church and theatre formed a strange dichotomy -- one was the temple of God, the other, the synagogue of Satan. As long as the two were kept separate the Church was safe, but unfortunately some of those who attended the one on occasion foolishly attended the other. Both Chrysostom and Salvian complain that, regardless of the weather, many professed Christians "spurn the temple of God in order that they may run to the theater" (Salvian 163-64; Chrysostom, *Commentary on Saint John* 3-4, 116-17; homilies 1, 58). As Chrysostom disapprovingly notes, they then infect the healthy body of Christ with the latter's diseases, debasing the Church, making it appear almost identical to its evil counterpart:

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[80] Quoted in George Ridpath's *The Stage Condemned* (1698), 54.

> Many come [into the church] gazing about at the beauty of women; others curious about the blooming youth of boys. After this, dost thou not marvel, how bolts are not launched, and all things are not plucked up from their foundations? For worthy both of thunderbolts and hell are the things that are done . . . . Doth the church seem to thee a brothel? . . . These things do the spectacles of wantonness teach you, the pest that is so hard to put down. (*Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew* 443; homily 73)[81]

The eyes of Christians were easily affected and infected by theatre's spectacle. Individuals learned evil by example and were particularly susceptible to those examples that were visual: citing Plutarch, George Ridpath writes, "Nothing entreth more effectually into the Memory than that which cometh by seeing; things heard do lightly pass away, but the Ideas of what we have seen . . . stick fast in us whether we will or not" (105).[82] Once infected by the theatre, spectators were forever changed. As Salvian points out, murderers and robbers do not cease to be murderers and robbers when they are not killing or stealing; in the same way, "all those who delight in games . . . are not mentally blameless of the guilt involved in looking at the games even when they are not looking, because they would always look if they could" (155). In the above-cited passage from his *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, Chrysostom suggests that spectators of plays

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[81] In *The Stage Condemned*, Ridpath translates this passage as follows:

> Many come to Church to behold the Beauties of Men and Women; do ye not therefore wonder, that Thunderbolts are not darted forth on every side? but these things ye have learned from the unchast Theatre, that most contagious Plague, that unavoidable Snare of Idle Persons. Such is the accursed Fruits of Stage-Plays, not only to make the Playhouse, but the very Church of God a Brothel. (59)

[82] Thomas Pecock, in his mid-fifteenth-century *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, defends visual representations for this very reason. He argues that "visable remembrances" should be used to educate the laity in religious matters, since "the iȝe siȝt schewith and bringith into the ymaginacioun and into the mynde withynne in the heed of a man myche mater and long mater sooner, and with lasse labour and traueil and peine, than the heering of the eere dooth" (212-13; pt. 2, ch. 11). Pecock points out that a person will be reminded of many more saints' lives by looking at images in a church than he would be by spending the same length of time reading religious texts (213). He also maintains that images will affect a man who is weary from labour or feeble-minded more than the preaching of a sermon or the reading of Scripture would (213-14).

are always looking, whether in the theatre or in the church, the brothel or the marketplace, and are always ready to act on what they see. When the eye is infected, the world becomes a stage and spectators quickly become actors. Incited to lust and taught how most effectively to satisfy that lust -- "howe to bee false and deceyue . . . husbandes, or husbandes their wyues, howe to playe the harlottes, to obtayne one's loue, howe to rauishe, howe to beguyle, howe to betraye" (Northbrooke 94) -- audience members move out into society. According to Stubbes, every theatrical performance ends with spectators acting out roles they have passively observed: "these goodly pageants being done, euery mate sorts to his mate, euery one bringes another homeward of their way verye freendly, and in their secret conclaues (couertly) they play *th*e Sodomits, or worse. And these be the fruits of Playes and Enterluds, for the most part" (L8$_v$).

Defenders of the theatre protested that not all plays contained or encouraged such scurrilous behavior. They point out that, on the whole, players "seeke not to hurte, but desire to please," and have in some cases, of their own volition, "purged their comedies of wanton speaches" (Gosson 27). In response to such claims, Gosson warns his readers that "the corne which they [the players] sell is full of cockle, and the drinke that they drawe overcharged with dregges" (27). That which appears to be good can sometimes be most evil, just as the Christian most devout in appearance and practice may in reality be the foulest of heretics:

> There is more in them [the plays] then we perceive: the Divell standes at our elbowe when we see not, speaks when we heare him not, strikes when we feele not, and woundeth sore when he raseth no skinne nor rentes the fleshe. In those thinges that we lest mistrust the greatest daunger doeth often lurke: the countrieman is more afraid of the serpent that is hid in the grasse, than the wilde beaste that openly feedes upon the mountaines: the marriner is more endaungered by privye shelves then knowen rockes . . . . There is more perill in close fistuloes then outward sores, in secret ambushe then mayne batteles, in undermining then playne assaulting, in friendes then foes, in civill discorde then forrayne warres. (27)

Even though some plays omit vice altogether or purposefully show "its fatall and abortive ends" to "terrifie men from the like abhorred practises" (Heywood 53), this does not make them commendable or good. Neither does it make, as some defenders claim, "playes . . . as good as sermons" (Stubbes L7$_v$; Northbrooke 93). According to Stubbes, such an assertion is a "blasphemie intollerable" -- he asks: "Are filthie playes & bawdy enterluds comparable to the word of God, *th*e foode of life, and life it selfe?" "It is all one, as if they had said, bawdrie, hethenrie, paga*n*rie, scurrilitie, and diuelrie it self, is equall with the word of God," he concludes, indignant; "Or that the Deuill, is equipotent with the Lord" (L7$_v$).

Such condemnations suggest that the theatre was not seen merely to provide the occasion or opportunity for sin, but was regarded as something that was, in its very nature, grossly sinful. Dramatic images were considered inherently idolatrous; after all, the theatre was in its essence hypocrisy and illusion. Tertullian writes:

> the devil makes the tragic actor taller on his *cothurni*, because 'nobody can add a cubit to his stature;' he wants to make a liar out of Christ. And then all this business of masks, I ask if God can be pleased with it, who forbids the likeness of anything to be made, how much more of His own image? The Author of truth loves no falsehood; all that is feigned is adultery in His sight. The man who counterfeits voice, sex or age, who makes a show of false love and hate, false sighs and tears, He will not approve, for He condemns all hypocrisy. (*De spectaculis* 287; ch. 23)

Theatrical signs are inherently empty and false; the player lies in everything he says and does, and therefore appearance does not correspond with "reality." Love and hate are simulated on the stage and therefore call into question the very nature of the external sign. True emotion reflects internal truth, yet, Tertullian admits, outside behaviours may not reflect real tempers and so may be deceptive or hypocritical.[83]

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[83] William Law clearly explicates (as he develops) this argument against the theatre in his *Absolute Unlawfulness of the Stage-Entertainment Fully Demonstrated* (1726). He suggests that, through their simple proximity to the liminal player, spectators begin themselves to participate in theatrical hypocrisy, protesting their own virtue and modesty while frequenting the very "Fountain-head of all Lewdness," the theatre (16). The spectators' substitution of illusion for reality, of appearance for substance, causes Law to ask the philosophical, ontological question:

> What is Modesty? Is it a little *mechanical outside* Behaviour, that goes no farther than a few *Forms* and *Modes* at particular Times and Places? Or is it a *real Temper*, a natural Disposition of the Heart, that is founded in *Religion*? Now, if Modesty is only a mechanical Observance of a little outside Behaviour, then I can easily perceive how a modest Woman may frequent *Plays*; there is no Inconsistency for such a one to be one thing in one Place, and another in another Place; to disdain an immodest Conversation, and yet at the same time, relish and delight in immodest and impudent Speeches in a

Tertullian thus maintains that there is an essential core within the individual to which external acts must correspond in order to be authentic. In contrast, Phillip Stubbes suggests that the exact opposite is true, that outside behaviour actually constitutes the internal temper of the individual or actor:

> who wil call him a wiseman that plaieth the part of a foole and a vice? who can call him a Christian, who playeth *the* part of a deuil, the sworne enemie of Christe; who can call him a iust man, that playeth the part of a dissembling hipocrite? And to be breef, who can call him a straight deling man, who playeth a Cosoners trick? (M1$_{r-v}$)

Stubbes implies that hypocrisy is impossible: anyone who acts like a criminal is a criminal, and should be treated and referred to as such. Centuries earlier, Gerhoh of Reichersberg expressed much the same idea in his treatise on the Antichrist -- he argued that those who represent dramatically "the deeds of Antichrist or the rage of Herod are themselves guilty of the vices of the personnages portrayed . . . . they don't, as is their intention, lie in their playing but exhibit the truth" (trans. in Barish 67). This, of course, stands in sharp contrast to the heretic, who acts like a true believer but should in no way be given the title of or respect due to his "real" counterpart.

Mechanical behavior then means both nothing and everything -- the spectator is an actor both inside and outside the theatre, and the actor is no better or other than his actions on the stage. The boundary between illusion and reality, stage and audience is completely obscured and can only be restored by an act of God -- if not in the present,[84] then in the distant future. In *De Spectaculis*,

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> publick *Play-House*. But if Modesty is a *real Temper* and Disposition of the Heart, that is founded in the Principles of Religion, then I confess I cannot comprehend, how a Person of such Modesty should ever come twice into the Play-House. (16-17)

Like Tertullian, Law believes that "Modesty" exists internally as a signified. This gives rise to the possibility of hypocrisy -- of a division, disjunction, or rupture between one's "mechanical outside Behaviour" and one's natural "Disposition of the Heart."

[84] Arthur Bedford, in his much later *Evil and Danger of Stage-Plays* (1706), warns the theatre-going English public that God is capable of and willing to answer present artifice with authentic, immediate action. He relates the events of a recent "miracle" involving the theatre:

> the *Actors* little regarded the Laws of *Man*, and at the same Time loudly cry'd to *God* himself for Judgments in their *Plays* call'd, *The Tempest*, and *Mackbeth*, wherein they presume to imitate the *Almighty* in his wonderful Acts; wherein they ascribe the *Lightnings*, *Thunder*, *Storm*, and *Tempest* to the Force of *Magical Arts*, that the *Hearers*

Tertullian looks forward to the very real spectacle of Christ's return and relishes the thought of witnessing Final Judgement, the moment when signifier and signified will be inextricably united and when appearance will finally be replaced by substance. He writes:

> But what a spectacle is already at hand -- the return of the Lord, now no object of doubt, now exalted, now triumphant! What exultation will that be of the angels, what glory that of the saints as they rise again! What the reign of the righteous thereafter! What a city, the New Jerusalem! Yes, and there are still to come other spectacles -- that last, that eternal Day of Judgement, that Day which the Gentiles never believed would come . . . . How vast the spectacle that day, and how wide! What sight shall wake my wonder, what my laughter, my joy and exultation? . . . And then there will be the tragic actors to be heard, more vocal in their own tragedy; and the players to be seen, lither of limb by far in the fire . . . . Such sights, such exultation . . . . But what are those things which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor ever entered into the heart of man? I believe, things of greater joy than circus, theatre or amphitheatre, or any stadium. (297, 299, 301; ch. 30)

Tertullian believes in things of greater reality, of "not fable . . . but truth; not artifice but simplicity" (297; ch. 30). Hell and eternal punishment are just two of these things.

Yet the theatre works against truth and simplicity, undercuts the idea of a greater reality, and calls into question the actual existence of hell and damnation. If men can "play" at hell on the stage and present it in jest, it stands to reason that God himself might "play" at hell and its punishments; thus the anonymous author of the first half[85] of *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* complains, "many men wenen that ther is no helle of everelastinge peine, but that God doth but

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> might think them to be no Judgments from *God*: And thus they mock'd the *Great Governour* of the World, *who alone commands the winds and the seas, and they obey him.* However, *God* pleaded his own Cause, and shew'd us that he would not be thus affronted, by sending a most dreadful Storm on the 26th Day of *November* 1703, which fill'd us with Horror and Amazement; wherein he manifested his Anger and his Power, and made us sensible to our Sorrow, That *this was his hand, and he did it.* (5-6)

Theatrical jests can thus quickly turn to deadly earnest. "Can we *swear, curse, blaspheme, mock God, ridicule Religion,* and *burlesque* the *Scriptures* in *Jest?*" Bedford asks; "A *Tempest* on the *Stage* may afterward be sent on the *Nation* [and] *Magical Representations* may provoke *God*, until the *Devil* is let loose to act more dismal *Tragedies*" (217). "*Trifles and Jests,*" he warns, "*will bring a Man into real Mischiefs and Inconveniencies*" (216).

[85] Clifford Davidson notes: "Because of the shift in tone and the identification of a different audience, the second part of the *Tretise* which begins [at line 386] is to be regarded as a continuation of Part I produced at a different time -- and, as the dialect evidence shows, by a different writer" (147, l. 386n).

threteth us, not to do it in dede, as ben pleyinge of miraclis in signe and not in dede" (p. 100, ll. 255-58). The idea that God might be an actor and a hypocrite, that his mechanical behavior and divine words might not correspond to any internal or external reality, is repugnant to the author(s) of the *Tretise*. The theatre and its lies, far from being instruments of God, are tools of the devil and of Antichrist regardless of subject matter:

> Christ seith that folc of avoutrie sechen [look for] siche singnys as a lecchour sechith signes of verrey love but no dedis of verrey love. So sithen thise miraclis pleyinge ben onely singnis, love withoute dedis, they ben not onely contrarious to the worschipe of God -- that is, bothe in signe and in dede -- but also they ben ginnys [snares] of the devvel to cacchen men to byleve of Anticrist, as wordis of love withoute verrey dede ben ginnys of the lecchour to cacchen felawchipe to fulfillinge of his leccherie. (p. 99, ll. 198-206)

Antichrist is God's theatrical counterpart, is an actor and a hypocrite, produces signs of God's majesty and power without himself possessing that majesty and power. In his *Libellus de Antichristo*, Adso writes that Christ's impostor "will produce many great and unheard of signs and miracles":

> He will make a terrible fire descend from the heavens, will make trees flower by some subtlety, will make the sea turbulent and then somehow calmed: also, he will cause the elements to change into different shapes -- he will cause water to reverse its course and order, and will make the air agitated with winds and commotions; he will also produce other miracles and wonders, such as making dead men rise in other men's view . . . . But these will be falsehoods and will differ from the truth: because he will delude men by means of magic arts and phantasms as Simon Magus played with his executioner, who, trying to kill him, killed a ram instead.[86]

Antichrist will be the ultimate actor and heretic, not only resembling a Christ-like man, but resembling Christ himself. As theatre and heresy incarnate, he will pervert the law and encourage idolatry and judaizing; because it is one with his nature and because it is his tool, the theatre, especially religious theatre, presently does all three. By suggesting hell is just a fiction, "miraclis pleying not onely pervertith oure bileve but oure verry hope in God" (*Tretise* p. 100, ll. 258-60). By presenting miracles on stage by means of special effects, players and spectators pay homage to cheap imitations, to idols instead of to God himself:

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[86] Faciet quoque signa multa et miracula magna et inaudita. Faciet ignem de coelo terribiliter descendere, arbores subito florere et crescere, mare turbari et subito tranquillari: naturas etiam in diversis figuris mutari, aquas contra cursus et ordinem converti, aera ventis commotionibusque multis agitari, et caetera quoque mirabilia et stupenda, mortuos scilicet in conspectu hominum resuscitari . . . . Sed et mendacia erunt, et a veritate aliena: quia per magicam artem et phantasiam deludet homines, sicut Simon Magus illusit illum, qui putans occidere eum, arietem occidit pro eo. (in *Patrologia Latina* [*PL*] 101: 1293-94).

> Rit fosothe as the licnesse of miraclis we clepen [call] miraclis, right so the golden calfe the children of Israel clepiden it God, not for it was in itsilf, but for they maden it to licnesse of God, in the whiche they hadden minde of the olde miraclis of God beforn and for that licnesse they worschipiden and preiseden, as they worschipiden and preisiden God in the dede of his miraclis to hem. And therfore they diden expresse maumetrye [idolatry]. So sithen now on dayes myche of the puple worschipith and preisith onely the lickenesse of the miraclis of God as myche as the word of God in the prechours mowth by the whiche alle miraclis be don. No dowte that ne the puple doth more maumetre now in siche miraclis pleyinge than dide the puple of Israel that time in heringe of the calf . . . . (p. 112, ll. 637-49)

Players and spectators participate not only in the Jews' idolatry but also in their preference for signs instead of things signified, for things fleshly rather than things spiritual. They judaize each time they present or view the works of Christ on the stage:

> sithen the serymonies of the olde lawe, albeit that they weren given by God, for they weren fleyshly, they shulden not be holde with the Newe Testament, for it is gostly. Myche more pleyinge, for it is fleysly, never bedyn [commanded] of God, shulde not ben don with the mervelouse werkis of God, for they ben gostly. For as the pleyinge of Ismael with Isaac shulde han bynomyn Isaac his heretage, so in the keping of the seremonies of the olde lawe in the Newe Testament shulde han bynomen men ther bileve in Crist, and han made men to gon bacward, that is to seye, fro the gostly living of the Newe Testament to the fleyshly living of the Olde Testament.
>
> Myche more pleyinge of miraclis benemeth men ther bileve in Crist and is verre goinge bacward fro dedis of the spirit to onely signes don after lustis of the fleysh that ben agenus alle the deedis of Crist, and so miraclis pleyinge is verre apostasye fro Crist. (pp. 108-09, ll. 521-37)

Worse, players and spectators participate in the very crimes of those Jews who tormented Christ on earth. The actors' and audience members' sins are greater, however, since they mock God the Father instead of his Son: "sithen thes miraclis pleyeris taken in bourde the ernestful werkis of God, no doute that ne they scornen God as diden the Jewis that bobbiden Crist, for they lowen at his passioun as these lowyn and japen of the miraclis of God" (p. 97, ll. 133-37). This is no venial sin. According to Aquinas, the guilt of those who mocked and crucified Christ was somewhat tempered because they were deceived by their religious leaders and were merely following orders; however, their sins were still "most grievous," second only to those committed by Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate. Then as now, ignorance of the law was no excuse and even aggravated guilt if "affected":

> For they saw manifest signs of His Godhead; yet they perverted them out of hatred and envy of Christ; neither would they believe His words, whereby He avowed that He was the Son of God . . . . Affected ignorance does not excuse from guilt, but seems, rather, to aggravate it: for it shows that a man is so strongly attached to sin that he wishes to incur ignorance lest he avoid sinning. (2281, 2282; pt. 3, q. 47, art. 5)

The Jews therefore sinned "as crucifiers not only of the Man-Christ, but also as of God" (2282; pt. 3, q. 47, art. 5). They possessed the law and the messianic prophecies but chose to ignore them, just as miracle players and spectators choose to ignore God's commandment to "halowyn his name, giving drede and reverence in all minde of his werkis, withoute ony pleying or japinge" (*Tretise* p. 97, ll. 142-43). The ignorance of both is affected, willful, and perverse; their crimes are alike in nature and in degree of culpability.

According to the *Tretise*, then, medieval actors and spectators were tormentors of God, judaizers, idolaters, heretics, apostates, and, worse still, followers of Antichrist. Under the appearance of worshipping God, they mocked him, and encouraged others in false beliefs concerning the faith. Even those who sympathized with the theatre were infected by it: the anonymous author of Part 2 of the *Tretise* addresses a "half frynde" who, unconvinced of the evil of stage plays, himself constitutes a threat to the community, is a "tarriere to soule helthe" (p. 104, l. 386). Theatre is sin, is heresy, and is disease, and like these three things, "thretith myche venjaunse of God" (p. 110, ll. 566-67). The repercussions could be immediate -- "ever sithen regnyde siche maner apostasie in the puple, seside never the venjaunce of God upon us, outher of pestilence, outher of debate, outher of flodis, other of derthe, and of many othere . . ." (p. 110, ll. 578-82) -- or could be delayed. If they were not immediate, if disasters and plagues did not strike the citizens of England instantaneously, this did not mean that God himself had become an ineffectual actor. God is not all talk and no action, all sign and no deed. Believer and heretic, player, spectator, and critic -- all could be certain that evil would be recompensed in the end:

> Also, frend, take hede what Crist seith in the gospelle that, 'right as it was in the dayes of Noye agenus the greet flood, men weren etinge and drinkinge and ther likingis taking, and feerely cam the venjaunce of God of the grete flode upon hem; so it schalle ben of the coming of Crist to the day of dom,' that whanne men gifen hem most to ther pleyinge and mirthis, ferely schal come the day of dome upon hem with greet venjaunce beforn. Therfore oute of dowte, frynd, this miracle pleyinge that is now usid is but trewe threting of sodeyn venjaunce upon us. (p. 114, ll. 707-16)

7. Theatre and Christian Identity: *Imitatio Christi*

In *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, V.A. Kolve dismisses the *Tretise*'s criticisms of the theatre as "hyperzealous" and "confused" (22). He accuses its author of "clinging rigidly to two polarities: real and unreal, true and false" (22), of privileging the "true" and of considering "Whatever was false . . . to be an abomination to God and a peril to men's souls" (22). Although Kolve does admit that the author may be correct (or orthodox) in assuming God hates an untruth -- "In this he may have been right," he grudgingly concedes (22) -- he pleads special status for the theatre. "[T]he world of play (and its mode of meaningfulness) lies outside the antithesis, truth or falsehood," he writes; "This fact is common to children's games, knightly tournaments, champion wrestling, and all drama that has ever been" (22).

In the course of extricating theatre from the polarities of real and unreal, true and false, Kolve therefore "discovers" yet another polarity anterior to and greater than all the rest: that of drama and "actual experience." Only the second term of this antithesis carries with it the possibility of truth and falsehood -- the theatre is exclusively concerned with "play" and "game," and so can be neither one nor the other. According to Kolve, the author of the *Tretise* is so concerned to root out untruths that he cannot appreciate "the dramatic artifact as something analogous, but in a root-sense 'unrelated' to real life" (21). "The duration of play is a momentary interval in, and abstention from, the real concerns of life," he writes; "when the audience disperses they resume these concerns, the most significant of which for the Christian Middle Ages was the doing of the will of God" (21). The *Tretise* incorrectly makes no distinction between the audience's time inside and outside the theatre, and naïvely subjects both to the identical criticisms. The reason for this, Kolve suspects, is that its author mistakes theatre for real life, but it is more likely that the opposite is true: the author "mistakes" real life for theatre.

In *Literal Figures: Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis*, Thomas Luxon argues that the post-Reformation Christian read himself or herself as an incomplete type or allegory, and so recognized that he or she possessed "a self that [was] never, in this world, a true self, and . . . [regarded] his or her own life in this world as an extended figuration of true life in the next" (25). In this, the Protestant resembles the Jew, "Christianity's old man, bound by blindness to a 'carnal' existence which he does not realize is no more than an allegorical drama of true spiritual being" (25). Only through an act of interpretation is the old (Jew) self rendered old and the new (Christian) self brought into being: "The old self becomes an allegory out of which the new self . . . the hermeneutic self, 'reads' divinity, just as medieval hermeneutics read out of the Hebrew scriptures a divinity its Israelite characters could never see" (25-26). The Protestant never loses his or her identity as allegory in this life, and so is not himself or herself a "fulfillment" but a "figure of the fulfillment promised -- and so deferred -- in the world to come" (26). The Christian's task is therefore double: he must "oscillate between the roles of allegorical figure and exegete of that allegorical figure" (26), must "'read' his experience in this world as an allegory of his being in the next" (26). When believers as "allegorical personifications" interpret the world around them as well as their own actions, "they do so as characters in a play or a fiction might do, characters for whom the horizon of the fictional world in which they are staged remains finally opaque, a veil hardly even perceived as a veil, let alone seen through" (26). Therefore "Their being, actions, and even their interpretations of being and actions are never more than figurations whose proper exegesis can only be the work of another" (26) -- that is, the work of God the Father, author of the play, at the end of time.

Luxon concludes that "reformed Christianity, for all of its insistence on literalism, remains profoundly committed to an allegorical ontology" (26); the same could be said of the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, which, for all of its insistence on "ernestful dedis," recognizes in its second half that even these can be read as acts of "play." The *Tretise* cites the example of David in 2 Samuel 6:

> Than, frend, yif we wilen algate pleyen, pleyne we as Davith pleyide bifore the harke of God, and as he spac byfor Michol his wif, dispising his pleyinge, wherfore to hir he seide in this wise: 'The Lord liveth, for I shal pleyn bifore the Lord that hath chosen me rather than thy fadur, and al the hous of him, and he comaundide to me that I were duke upon the puple of the Lord of Israel, and I schal pleyn, and I schal be maad fowlere more than I am maad, and I schal ben meke in min eyen, and with the handwymmen of the whiche thou speeke I schal more glorious aperen.' (p. 114, ll. 724-33)

David's playing and thus the playing of all Christians distinguishes itself in three important ways:

> The firste is that we beholden in how many thingis God hath given us his grace passinge oure neghyeboris, and in so myche more thanke we him, fulfilling his wil and more tristing in him agen alle maner reproving of oure enmys. The secound parcel stant in continuel beinge devowt to God almighty and fowl and reprovable to the world, as Crist and his apostelis shewiden hemself and as Davith seide. The thridde parcel stant in beinge as lowly in oure owne eyen or more than we schewen us withouteforthe, settinge lest by in us silf as we knowen mo sinnes of us silf than of ony other . . . . (p. 115, ll. 734-44)

The Christian debases himself or herself, assumes a role in this world in order to obtain a "true" identity in the next; he or she plays before an audience consisting of God the Father, Christ the Son, as well as "alle the seintis of hevene" (p. 115, l. 745), and is rewarded at the Day of Judgement on the basis of his or her performance: "at the day of dome and in the blisse of hevene we schul ben more glorious in as myche as we pleyn betere the thre forseid perselis heer . . ." (p. 115, ll. 745-48). Theatre or allegory is not opposed to reality (as Kolve suggests) except when taken in an eschatological context -- nothing can be reality at present; everything is theatre or "vanitas." However, this does not mean that it is unimportant, that it is "unrelated" to the "real life" to come. As the *Tretise* suggests, one's performance in this world constitutes one's final identity -- as well as destination -- in the next.

This idea of present life as play or theatre was by no means the exclusive property of Lollards and Protestants. In a highly orthodox Good Friday sermon on the *thema* "Christ has suffered for us, leaving you an example that you may follow in his footsteps" (Wenzel 276), the individual's life on earth is explicitly compared to a play -- "You will understand that men's life in this state is like the experience of men in a *somer game*" (279). The play or game that organizes the world was written by Christ at the moment of his Passion and Crucifixion. No ordinary dramatist, he teaches his apostles and followers the roles they are to assume by his own example:

> Of this matter Christ spoke to his disciples when he had to leave them, and he did so as a matter of forewarning as well as counsel. First he forewarned them of the discomforts, tribulations, and sufferings which they would have to endure if they wanted to be saved, when he said: 'Where I go, you will not be able to come now,' John 13; you will not yet suffer, you will not yet play. Then Peter said to him, 'Why can I not follow you now? I will lay my life down for you.' Jesus said to him, 'But you will follow me later' -- first I shall show you the play by word and example, and later you will follow. And he showed him the manner of the play. 'The world will rejoice,' that is, 'the world did not recognize him;' the tormentors and demons and such will rejoice, 'but you will grieve, mourn, and weep,' for 'if they have persecuted me they will also persecute you' . . . . And Christ not only taught the manner of this play thus in words, but on the immediately following day and in the same night he taught by his very action how his followers would later on play, as he was captured, forsaken, bound and beaten, and then put naked on the cross. (280)

The role prescribed by Christ for his followers is not an easy one. The sermon's author recalls a performance of the Passion in which the actor hired to play Christ was, even in play, abused and mistreated; thus when he was asked to perform the role a second time, the actor declined, explaining:

> I was Christ and was crucified, beaten, mocked, held to be a fool; I was hungry and thirsty, and nobody gave me anything. I looked down below and saw tormentors and demons in great joy. For he who could make them drink and eat was well pleased. I looked to the right and saw Peter on the cross, and I looked to the left and saw Andrew on the cross, so that for me and my apostles everything was a pain, but for our tormentors and the demons everything was comfort. And therefore I tell you for sure that if I must play again, I do not want to be Christ nor an apostle but a tormentor or a demon. (280)

The preacher concludes that "many become tormentors and demons, so that they draw from the good and move to evil"(280), because of the difficulty of playing Christ's pageant. In so doing, they betray a fundamental misunderstanding of their actions as theatre. One of the actor-Christ's companions reminds him, "it is the nature of our play that the stretched-out Christ and his apostles fare badly and suffer much while the play goes on, and the tormentors and demons are well off" (280). The actor or believer who chooses to play Christ must remember that the drama will not continue forever, that there will be an end to the suffering. Theatre is a temporary if necessary state of affairs, and so the weary actor is encouraged, "Wait till the end of the play and you shall be well off!" (280).

Reward comes only as the theatrical production ends, as does the individual's identity. Because the Christian is required to act like Christ, to assume his character, his or her ontological status is constantly deferred, is located simultaneously in the past and in the future. Christ's Crucifixion is an historical event as well as a dramatic text which prescribes subsequent theatrical representations; these representations both remember and anticipate Christ's death (as manifested in the deaths of individual Christians) to the end of time itself. As individual performances or realizations of "Christ's pageant," Christians, whether Protestant or Catholic, have no present identity, are nothing more than a promise and a link to the future, or, thought of another way, an annoying delay in its fulfillment.[87] Their mechanical actions do not therefore evince an actual core of identity to which they correspond, as Tertullian argues -- because Christians act as Christ himself did, this does not mean that they *are* Christ. Rather, as Stubbes and Gerhoh of Reichersberg maintain, mechanical actions constitute, or even better, substitute for that core, which has been temporarily postponed -- because Christians act as Christ did, they will be Christ, will be part of his whole, incorruptible and uncorrupted body after the Day of Judgement. Until that time, the Christian remains unformed and Christ's body, as a pattern or prototype of identity, continues to bleed.

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[87] My argument here has been influenced by Huet's *Rehearsing the Revolution* (see especially 1-5, 20-21).

8. Theatre, Parody, and "Simulation"

In his book, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, Jonas Barish notes that Puritan writers waxed "clamorous over the offense to nature involved in incorrect dress and the use of cosmetics" (92); he speculates that the Puritans' hatred of players stemmed from the latter's (theatrical) practice of substituting "a self of their own contriving for the one given them by God" (93). If one assumes that the self is whole and discreet (or, if like the Puritan, one insists that it *be* whole and discreet), if one assumes that it forms a core at the centre of the individual, the antitheatrical prejudice could be explained as a natural response to a relatively benign crisis of identity (i.e., alienation) incited in actors and spectators by the theatrical performance. Barish writes:

> when a player has given over his consciousness to some form of identification with a character, or when a spectator, identifying with that character, has done the same, what happens to his own self? Is it suspended somehow for the duration of the performance? And if so, is this not a spiritually dangerous state of affairs? Does it not in fact resemble demonic possession? (76)

According to Luxon, however, neither the Puritan nor the actor would receive (in this world at least) a whole identity from God or from any other source -- his or her "self" was constantly deferred and existed only in the past or future. Medieval Catholics faced a similar, continual flux: their individual and social fulfillment and thus full presence was perpetually arrested or postponed until that time at which they would re-enter Christ's glorified body and would themselves transform into fantastic, unchanging beings of crystal and gold. Of course, Luxon's recognition that the Christian self is not whole, that it is completely and continually contrived, that it is suspended not for the duration of a play but for a lifetime, and that there is nothing to be substituted or possessed in the course of a performance, presents an even more "spriritually dangerous state of affairs" than does Barish's speculated alienation or dramatic "demonic possession." The theatre's ability, not to suspend reality, but to dispel reality, could have justified its condemnation by those troubled by the implications of identity as performance. The antitheatrical prejudice might then be a response to a crisis of identity even greater than that of alienation.

The Christian's worldly existence as a mere allegory of true being appears roughly analogous to Judith Butler's recent phenomenological reading of the gendered subject as performative, and therefore a short discussion of her theories, outlined in the book *Gender Trouble*, might be helpful here. According to Butler, the "masculine" or "feminine" subject's "acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance [of masculine or feminine identity], but produce this *on the surface* of the body" (136); thus, the gendered subject (like the Christian, or like Stubbes' actor) is nothing more than the sum of his or her own actions:

> Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (136)

The subject's apparent integrity, far from being an internal truth, is a public construction:

> if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the 'integrity' of the subject. (136)

Particular manifestations of gender (and of Christian belief), as produced and "expressed" in acts of play, reflect and instill a desire for coherence in the bodies of individuals as well as in their social *corpus*. Such desire supports and creates "the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core" through repeated "masculine" and "feminine" acts; in turn, this illusion is maintained "for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (136). By displacing the public, and so political, origin of gender onto a nonexistent "psychological" core, gender performance precludes "an analysis of the political constitution of the gendered subject and its fabricated notions about the ineffable interiority of its sex or of its true identity" (136). In the case of Christian belief, the "interior and organizing . . . core" is projected into the future and the obligatory frame is Western Catholicism, but the argument and processes appear to remain much the same.

Because identity in both cases is either illusory or "deferred," it is open to attack. Gender may be parodied or simulated in over-the-top drag performances or subtle acts of cross-dressing: a man, heterosexual or not, who assumes "feminine" dress and mannerisms, argues against the psychological and internal origin of those actions and for "*the imitative structure of gender itself*" (137). Gender parody "does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate;" rather, "the parody is *of* the very notion of an original" (138). Thus the transvestite, like the medieval heretic, is a disturbing thing -- he not only suggests that actions may not correspond to internal "truth," but that there may be no such thing as internal truth. Jean Baudrillard in his book entitled *Simulations*, wonders whether a repressive social and discursive apparatus "would not react more violently to a simulated hold-up than to a real one?":

> For the latter only upsets the order of things, the right to property, whereas the other interferes with the very principle of reality. Transgression and violence are less serious, for they only contest the *distribution* of the real. Simulation is infinitely more dangerous, however, since it always suggests, over and above its object, that *law and order themselves might really be nothing more than a simulation.* (38)

The heretic is more threatening to the Christian than the pagan who worships false gods; the man who closely resembles a woman is more threatening to the male identity than a woman's body, appearance, or mannerisms could ever be. The heretic / female impersonator is a serpent in the grass, a thing that appears whole and holy but is not; he / she lies in wait, anticipating his / her chance to "infect" the individual by revealing that he too is an empty shell, a simulation.[88]

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[88] Thus, the closer a man resembles a woman, the more disruptive gender performance will be -- witness, for example, audience reaction to the transexual character in *The Crying Game*. The flamboyant performance offered by the drag queen is subversive in a different way, or at least, to

According to Butler, at its best, "parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities" (138). However, she acknowledges that parody has its double, that it can be "domesticated and recirculated as [an instrument] of cultural hegemony" (139):

> Practices of parody can serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration and one that appears as derived, phantasmatic and mimetic -- a failed copy, as it were. And surely parody has been used to further a politics of despair, one which affirms a seemingly inevitable exclusion of marginal genders from the territory of the natural and the real. (146)

Baudrillard warns that an "indefinite recurrence of simulation" will stimulate the repressive regime, the "site" of power, "to reinject realness and referentiality everywhere, in order to convince us of the reality of the social, of the gravity of the economy, and the finalities of production" (*Simulations* 42). "[T]he subverter of all things is he that goes to the theatre," Chrysostom writes in his *Commentary on Saint John*; "it is he that brings in a grievous tyranny" (249; homily 37). Revolution will inevitably be met with violent retribution, and therefore, with every subversive act, there arises yet another opportunity for the "natural" or the "real" to reinscribe itself with greater force than before.

As was briefly mentioned above (62), Jonathan Dollimore attempts to explain parody's curious and dangerous double nature in his theory of the perverse dynamic. He concedes that "dissidence may not only be repressed by the dominant (coercively and ideologically), but in a sense actually produced by it, hence consolidating the powers which it ostensibly challenges" (26-27). Instabilities and contradictions do not attack dominant structures from without but from within, for the very inner logic which allows for the development of social processes also allows for their

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a different degree. He / she flaunts the distance between biological identity and gender performance, presenting himself / herself to the audience as either a successful (if excessive) or failed (if a man sports a moustache in addition to his crinoline) copy of "woman" -- not as a simulation. The drag queen's performance relies upon the audience's knowledge that he / she "is" not what he / she appears to be (this distance provokes wonder or humour), while the transvestite or transexual attempts to deny or conceal this supposed distinction.

negation (87). The individual contained and produced by the dominant structure -- for example, the heretic in the Church -- may be rejected and displaced as other, but his proximity to that structure and to those contained and produced by it leaves open the possibility of a "perverse return, an undoing, a transformation" (33). By ejecting the proximate as other, the institution consolidates itself, constructing its own identity as real or natural; however, it lays itself open to a return of the antithetical, to a "tracking-back of the 'other' into the 'same'" (33), to a return of the unnatural to the natural.

For Dollimore then, acts of repression always carry with them the possibility of revolution. The fact that subversion is both produced and put down by authority does not mean it is nothing other than authority's tool, "a ruse of power to consolidate itself" (89). As history can attest, dominant ideologies genuinely "fear" the subversion, interrogation, and disarticulation they themselves contain: revolution after revolution has been met with brutal repression "not because the subversive was only ever contained . . . but because the challenge really *was* subversive" (89). In giving birth to the means of their own justification, institutions create the means of their own destruction, or at least, modification. Most of the time, the dominant ideology and that which opposes it are locked in a delicate balance of power -- the former cannot completely resist change, while the latter can affect only slight change over a long period of time.

And then there are times of plague, characterized by the complete breakdown of systems and institutions. Whereas in times of relative health contradictions and incongruities allow select meanings to be put back into circulation, allow bits and pieces of the body social to be "unmade and remade, disarticulated and rearticulated" (87), epidemics put all meanings back into circulation simultaneously, and dissolve the entire social *corpus* along with the diseased body (brain and lungs, sites of consciousness) of the individual. The time of plague is far from the triumph of subversion since in it there remains nothing to be subverted -- no notions of Christian or gendered behaviour, no idea of law, no appreciation of authority. The institution cannot patch its holes fast enough; it bleeds as copiously as did Christ during and after the Passion, at least until the plague is over and there is death or cure.

In either case, meanings are eventually reincorporated into systems for better or for worse (87) -- usually for worse. As Artaud points out, tyranny enjoys a special relationship with plague, as does the tyrant; on the subject of Saint-Rémys he writes: "it cannot be denied that between the viceroy and the plague a palpable communication, however subtle, was established . . ." (*TD* 17).[89] The threat of disease justifies Saint-Rémys' horrific actions in the eyes of his subjects, who are grateful to have been protected from the plague, fearing nothing so much as the uncertainty it brings. As both the scourge of God and the gift of God, a punishment for evil and a reward for faith, plague reveals everything to be simulation -- theatre, heresy, "real" life itself; it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie which is the actor himself (31; Gallimard 46). In response, the tyrant offers another mask with a tighter strap, less likely to slip if a bit more constraining. The individual, bleeding profusely from every orifice, takes what he or she can get.

According to Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, the subject's ego (the psychoanalytic equivalent of the theatrical mask) forms in part as a response to the body's abjection, incompleteness, openness; because it ingests and excretes, absorbs and expels, identity cannot possibly be rooted in the body and so must be located elsewhere (2-3). As a speaking subject, an "I," "I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit," "expel *myself*" in the form of that which was inside me, "spit *myself* out . . . abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (3). The body itself is a disorder and a plague against which the ego develops as defence. It is simultaneously the tyrant of the self and the mask it proffers, or the site from which the self may speak with at least a degree of certainty and security. However, the body remains to challenge the ego, as does the "radically excluded," "jettisoned object" which, like

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[89] "on ne peut nier qu'entre la peste et lui ne se soit établie une communication pondérable, quoique subtile . . ." (24).

Dollimore's rejected proximate, threatens a return to trouble the "same." The ego never achieves wholeness -- there is always the hope that the next excretion or expulsion might be the final, healing one, that it will stop up all the orifices of the body, but that hope is never realized. Even in death, the body is not sealed, but instead itself falls away as excrement, "is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object" (4).

The tyrant ego attempts to protect the self from the troubling image of the cadaver while the body lives, acting as a death mask, preserving the body's features in a relatively uncorrupted state until it actually dies. The ego's defences are far from perfect, however. Occasionally, the self is confronted by an instance of "true theater" -- "refuse and corpses" which "*show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (3). Miri Rubin in "The Body, Whole and Vulnerable" optimistically reads the body as a site of almost infinite possibilities, but it also could be and has been read as the end of those possibilities, the end of all possibility. Even the living body is a corpse, or, as it was expressed in the Middle Ages, "food for worms;" it would seem much better, then, to wear the mask now and to hope for an incorruptible body in future.

However, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari encourage individuals to reject this "natural" urge to fix the self as ego, advising them instead to embrace the infinite possibilities of the ever-changing body and never to confine themselves to contained and centralized egos or masks. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, which Foucault in his preface to the same calls "an *Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life*" (xiii), Deleuze and Guattari espouse something they call "schizoanalysis": the systematic conversion of presently neurotic, oedipal analysands to anti-oedipal schizophrenics. This conversion requires the systematic destruction of those masks or "resistances" which tyrannize the individual -- "beliefs and representations, theatrical scenes . . . Oedipus and castration" (314), and therefore, the ego itself. The schizophrenic "has long since ceased to believe" in such masks (23); his "center . . . has been abandoned by the ego," and so the subject "spreads itself out along the entire circumference of the circle" which is the self (21).

Always on the periphery, the subject has "no fixed identity" and so is "*defined* by the states through which it passes" (20). Although Deleuze and Guattari concede that the schizophrenic will, as a consequence, experience "insurmountable sufferings, unbearable needs" (23), they maintain that this is the necessary price of true freedom.

Yet very few men and women are "brave" enough to endure the suffering and uncertainty that schizophrenia entails; "the majority draw near the wall and back away horrified," deciding that it is "Better to fall back under the law of the signifier, marked by castration, triangulated in Oedipus" (135). Again, what lies behind the wall or the mask rebounds, can and in a majority of cases actually does create in the individual a desire for tyranny. Baudrillard, in *Fatal Strategies*, wonders what kind of state could effectively dissuade and annihilate "all terrorism [a modern plague] in the bud" (22). He suggests that that state would have to resemble Nazi Germany, and wonders, "If this is the price of security, is everybody deep down dreaming of this?" (22).

The individual's choices are therefore limited, and are almost equally unpalatable -- he or she could choose schizophrenia, which few would embrace for all of its glorification by Deleuze and Guattari, or tyranny and fascism. Ironically, these two apparently separate and even polar-opposite choices are, in the final analysis, identical. According to Baudrillard, the fascist state, in order to destroy terrorism, "would have to arm itself with such terrorism and generalize terror on every level" (*Fatal Strategies* 22); meanwhile, identity-less schizophrenics, no longer possessing subjects to be liberated or to resist their manipulation by outside sources, open themselves up to the very totalitarianism against which they supposedly wage war (Friedrich 282-97). Thus, the plague and tyranny enjoy a special communication because they are at bottom manifestations of the same thing. In his article, "Self-Engendering as a Verbal Body," Rodolphe Gasché points out that St. Anthony, the patron saint of the ship *Grand-Saint-Antoine* in Artaud's *Theater and its Double*, "presided during the eleventh century over a military and religious order founded in order to take care of those infected by the plague" (682). Gasché asks, "What does this vessel, that sails under the name of an order that fought the plague, contain?" answering in turn, "It carries within its hull the virus of the plague" (683). The ship *Grand-Saint-Antoine* "is infected precisely by that which it is supposed to fight, and is thus of the nature of a *pharmakon*" (683).[90] Gasché then goes on to note that "Neither the viceroy . . . nor the captain of the *Grand-Saint-Antoine* are contaminated by the plague" (691). He hypothesizes that this is so because, "as authorities, as *autocrats* in particular, they are of a similar nature to the self-engendered virus" (691).

It follows, then, that God himself, as the ultimate authority or autocrat, is finally no better or other than his supposed tool, the plague. In "To Have Done with the Judgement of God," Artaud explicitly equates the two:

> Well, this spirit originating with the American Indians is reappearing all over the world today under scientific poses which merely accentuate its morbid infectious power, the marked condition of vice, but a vice that pullulates with diseases,
> because, laugh if you like,
> what has been called microbes
> is god,
> and do you know what the Americans and the Russians use to make their atoms?
> They make them with the microbes of god.
> . . . .
> --I am not raving.
> I am not mad.
> I tell you that they have reinvented microbes in order to impose a new idea of god.
>
> They have found a new way to bring out god and to capture him in his microbic noxiousness. (trans. Weaver 569)[91]

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[90] The term *pharmakon*, discussed by Derrida in his article, "Plato's Pharmacy" (in *Dissemination*), can be variously defined as "a drug," "a medicine," or "a poison." According to Derrida, no one definition can be privileged or fixed -- the *pharmakon* is simultaneously an intoxicant, a remedy, and a toxin, and is none of the three.

[91]

> Or, cet esprit venu des Indiens d'Amérique ressort un peu partout aujourd'hui sous des allures scientifiques qui ne font qu'en accuser l'emprise infectieuse morbide, l'état accusé de vice, mais d'un vice qui pullule de maladies,
> parce que, riez tant que vous voudrez,
> mais ce qu'on appelé les microbes
> c'est dieu,
> et savez-vous avec quoi les Américains et les Russes font leurs atomes?
> Ils les font avec les microbes de dieu.
> . . . .

As a "microbe," God appears "at some moment in the development of the [plague] virus" (*TD* 21), not so much causing the disease as living off and in it. He manifests himself in the epidemic and the atomic explosion, and so under the guise of either "god" or "science," is as bad if not identical to those things from which he promises to save his believers.

Artaud's theory of plague and tyranny can be and has been misappropriated by earthly agents. Jan Kott cites the Jonestown Massacre as a perfect example of this. Like others before and after him, Jones convinced his followers that he was their saviour, that he had been sent to save them from evil men (capitalists and fascists in this particular case) who wanted to persecute and kill them. Kott's description evokes what must have been a horrible scene:

> At high noon, in front of the People's Temple, in the heart of the jungle, in a plantation started by white and black arrivals from the towns and ghettos of California, a middle-aged man in dark glasses, already displaying the signs of approaching obesity, ascended a platform as if it were a stage. On huge grounds in front of the Temple, men, women, and children gathered. The sick were brought on stretchers. Religious hymns sounded through the speakers. The man announced that all were to commit collective suicide.
>
> Huge pots with cool-aid [sic] mixed with cyanide were brought in. One after another, men and women approached the wooden steps of the Temple and drank from the paper cups provided. Afterwards, in tight embrace, they returned to their places where they lay down on the sun-burnt earth. Some of the children cried. They were calmed down by white-smocked nurses who gently poured the poison down their throats. The man in the dark glasses committed suicide last.
>
> 'In the theatre as in the plague there is a kind of strange sun,' wrote Artaud, 'a light of abnormal intensity by which it seems that the difficult and even impossible suddenly becomes our normal element.' It took a week to clear away the disintegrating corpses in the hot sun in Jonestown. The count was 918. 'We are not free,' wrote Artaud. 'And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theatre has been created to teach us that first of all.' In November 1978, in Guyana's jungle, the sky fell on the [sic] heads and the theatre of cruelty was consummated.
>
> The impossible took place. (32)

> -- Je ne délire pas.
> Je ne suis pas fou.
> Je vous dis qu'on a réinventé les microbes afin d'imposer une nouvelle idée de dieu.
>
> On a trouvé un nouveau moyen de faire ressortir dieu et de le prendre sur le fait de sa nocivité microbienne. ("Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu," *OC* 13: 102, 103)

"The last two decades in literature and poetry, in painting, music, and theatre are more and more generally defined by the term *post-modern,*" Kott observes. He then concludes his article with the ominous statement, "For me, it sounds like *post-mortem*" (32).

Kott is correct in reading the massacre as a debasement or commodification of Artaud's theatre of cruelty. The events that took place in Guyana, the blind obedience to a tyrant and whole-hearted participation in the plague (here so obviously conflated) that they evince, seem insignificant and profitless, not essential and thus tragic. Yet, because Jonestown offers itself as a disruptive simulation, it does on one level evoke Artaud's notion of cruelty, though at a terrible cost. Kott neglects to mention that a number of Jones' followers disobeyed his orders, and either attempted to flee or feigned their own deaths. The realization that one's god (or at least his representative on earth) is wrong, is evil, is a tyrant, a disease, more than blind obedience, evokes Artaud's cruelty. Although it would be monumentally insensitive to suggest that those who died in Guyana suffered no more than those disillusioned by Jones' actions, it would also be wrong to underestimate the horror of participating in a ritual that suddenly reveals its powerbase "to be the opposite of that which has been assumed," of discovering that good and evil "share an identical semiotic pattern" (Goodall, "The Plague" 539).

The truth is, anyone can make a mistake, can misread Antichrist for Christ or vice versa, and this is the terrible, cruel message of Jonestown, and of Artaud. Life itself is theatre and uncertainty; plague and related manifestations, stigmata or Eucharistic miracles, may be punishments for sin or rewards for faith, while the "holy" man may be destined for heaven or hell. Everything at present is allegory, and it sometimes seems -- with good reason, Artaud would argue -- that God the exegete is just waiting for the actor to make that fatal mistake. The possibility that God might be the evil demiurge of the Gnostics would seem to undercut his authority as well as that of his laws, and to a certain extent it does, but the opposite effect occurs simultaneously. Again and always there is the perverse dynamic: "To each ego its object," Kristeva writes, and "to each superego its abject" (2). The possibility that evil could make a perverse return to that subject who first cast "it" from heaven to hell perversely encourages, even necessitates, obedience to that subject and his laws. The more horrific and uncontrollable the abjection -- and the idea that God may be evil or lawless is pretty horrific -- the harsher laws become as if in compensation, to the point at which these laws even compel and constrain God. This is of course an impossibility and a contradiction, and the perverse dynamic would come into play once again -- if it weren't too late; if it weren't the day of Judgement.

This is the subject of the following chapters.

Chapter 2

The Problem of Reading

1. Artaud and the Masterpiece: The Empty Word and its Powers of Seduction

> We must get rid of our superstitious valuation of texts and *written* poetry. Written poetry is worth reading once, and then should be destroyed. Let the dead poets make way for others. Then we might even come to see that it is our veneration for what has already been created, however beautiful and valid it may be, that petrifies us, deadens our responses, and prevents us from making contact with that underlying power, call it thought-energy, the life force, the determinism of change, lunar menses, or anything you like. Beneath the poetry of the texts, there is the actual poetry, without form and without text. (*TD* 78)[1]

Artaud refused to perform literary masterpieces in his theatre for the simple reason that they no longer addressed contemporary audiences. "Masterpieces of the past are good for the past," he writes, "they are not good for us . . . . It is idiotic to reproach the masses for having no sense of the sublime when the sublime is confused with one or another of its formal manifestations, which are moreover always defunct manifestations" (*TD* 74).[2] He cites Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* as a perfect example: although the play has much to commend itself to Artaud and his theatrical sensibilities -- "there is the theme of incest and the idea that nature mocks at morality and that there are certain specified powers at large which we would do well to beware of, call them *destiny* or anything you choose" (74-75)[3] -- it fails on some level to communicate its timeless message to the modern public. This failure is in large part due to the play's antiquated "manner and language," which "have lost all touch with the rude and epileptic rhythm of our time" (75). Happily conceding that "Sophocles speaks grandly" throughout *Oedipus Rex*, Artaud blames the Greek playwright's elegance and eloquence for the fact that his play is no longer timely. Sophocles' "language is too refined for this age," Artaud complains; "it is as if he were speaking beside the point" (75).[4]

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[1] On doit en finir avec cette superstition des textes et de la poésie *écrite*. La poésie écrite vaut une fois et ensuite qu'on la détruise. Que les poètes morts laissent la place aux autres. Et nous pourrions tout de même voir que c'est notre vénération devant ce qui a été déjà fait, si beau et si valable que ce soit, qui nous pétrifie, qui nous stabilise et nous empêche de prendre contact avec la force qui est dessous, qu'on l'appelle l'énergie pensante, la force vitale, le déterminisme des échanges, les menstrues de la lune ou tout ce qu'on voudra. Sous la poésie des textes, il y a la poésie tout court, sans forme et sans texte. (121).

[2] Les chefs-d'oeuvre du passé sont bons pour le passé: ils ne sont pas bons pour nous . . . . Il est idiot de reprocher à la foule de n'avoir pas le sens du sublime, quand on confond le sublime avec l'une de ses manifestations formelles qui sont d'ailleurs toujours des manifestations trépassées. (115, 116)

[3] "il y a le thème de l'Inceste et cette idée que la nature se moque de la morale; et qu'il y a quelque part des forces errantes auxquelles nous ferions bien de prendre garde; qu'on les appelle *destin* ces forces, ou autrement" (116).

Yet, modern audiences are as eager for and receptive to the mystery and "grand notions" contained in a play such as *Oedipus Rex* as were its original audiences: "a public that shudders at train wrecks, that is familiar with earthquakes, plagues, revolutions, wars; that is sensitive to the disordered anguish of love, can be affected by all these grand notions and asks only to become aware of them . . ." (75). The audience's sole condition or demand is "that it [be] addressed in its own language, and that its knowledge of these [grand notions] not come to it through adulterated trappings and speech that belong to extinct eras which will never live again" (75).[5] The subject matter of the masterpiece need not be done away with, but the manner in which that subject is communicated must constantly be scrutinized and altered. Thus, while practitioners of true theatre "have the right to say what has [already] been said," they must do so "in a way that belongs to us, a way that is immediate and direct, corresponding to present modes of feeling, and understandable to everyone" (74).[6] They must write new masterpieces for the modern stage reflecting contemporary attitudes and sensibilities. Then, in an act just as significant and just as revolutionary, they must destroy their own new creations lest these in turn become as antiquated, as "asphyxiating" (74; "asphyxiante," 115), as "beside the point" as those they were written to replace (75).

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[4] "[les] habits et . . . [le] langage . . . ont perdu tout contact avec le rythme épilectique et grossier de ce temps. Sophocle parle haut peut-être mais avec des manières qui ne sont plus d'époque. Il parle trop fin pour cette époque et on peut croire qu'il parle à côté" (116).

[5]
> une foule que les catastrophes de chemins de fer font trembler, qui connaît les tremblements de terre, la peste, la révolution, la guerre; qui est sensible aux affres désordonnées de l'amour, peut atteindre à toutes ces hautes notions et ne demande qu'à en prendre conscience, mais à condition qu'on sache lui parler son propre langage, et que la notion de ces choses ne lui arrive pas à travers des habits et une parole frelatée, qui appartiennent à des époques mortes et qu'on ne recommencera jamais plus. (116-17).

[6] "Nous avons le droit de dire ce qui a été dit . . . d'une façon qui nous appartienne, qui soit immédiate, directe, réponde aux façons de sentir actuelles, et que tout le monde comprendra" (115-16).

This hatred and distrust of the masterpiece, evident in all of Artaud's writings, extends to (or more likely originates in) his hatred and distrust of words themselves. The masterpiece is nothing more than a collection of words, and "all words," according to Artaud, "once spoken, are dead and function only at the moment when they are uttered . . ." (75).[7] Therefore, just as he refused to perform masterpieces in his theatre of cruelty, Artaud refused (in theory at least) to express himself by means of words and by means of the cliché expressions they formed and constituted. In "All Writing is Pigshit," for example, Artaud rejects the need to identify and classify mental concepts and states of mind as well as the impulse to create and critique the written text. This rejection stems in part from the belief that words as they stand cannot correspond to and so very often take the place of more authentic ideas and feelings:

> And I told you so: no works of art, no language, no word, no thought, nothing.
> Nothing; unless maybe a fine Brain-Storm.
> A sort of incomprehensible and totally erect stance in the midst of everything in the mind.
> And don't expect me to tell you what all this is called, and how many parts it can be divided into; don't expect me to tell you its weight; or to get back in step and start discussing all this so that by discussing I may get lost myself and even, without even realizing it, start THINKING. And don't expect this thing to be illuminated and live and deck itself out in a multitude of words, all neatly polished as to meaning, very diverse, and capable of throwing light on all the attitudes and all the nuances of a very sensitive and penetrating mind. (trans. Rattray 38-39)[8]

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[7] "toute parole prononcée est morte et n'agit qu'au moment où elle est prononcée . . ." (117).

[8] Et je vous l'ait dit: pas d'oeuvres, pas de langue, pas de parole, pas d'esprit, rien.
Rien, sinon un beau Pèse-Nerfs.
Une sorte de station incompréhensible et toute droite au milieu de tout dans l'esprit.
Et n'espérez pas que je vous nomme ce tout, en combien de parties il se divise, que je vous dise son poids, que je marche, que je me mette à discuter sur ce tout, et que, discutant, je me perde et que je me mette ainsi sans le savoir à PENSER, -- et qu'il s'éclaire, qu'il vive, qu'il se pare d'une multitude de mots, tous bien frottés de sens, tous

From very early in his career, Artaud suffered from what he thought was a peculiar inability to convert thoughts and feelings into words and therefore to express and communicate them. In a letter to Jacques Rivière, dated 5 June 1923, he writes:

> I suffer from a horrible sickness of the mind. My thought abandons me at every level. From the simple fact of thought to the external fact of its materialization in words. Words, shapes of sentences, inner directions of thought, simple reactions of the mind -- I am in constant pursuit of my intellectual being. (trans. Weaver 31)[9]

Artaud's decision to reject the word as an appropriate vehicle of expression was not therefore initially a conscious or conscientious one; rather, his rejection of language was necessitated by circumstances beyond his control. Initially, Artaud blamed himself for this inability to communicate, attributing the strange effect to some mysterious disease or to an unfortunate but unique deformity of the mind. As Martin Esslin writes, Artaud was for a long time convinced "that 'thought' *could* exist in an unformulated, pre-verbal state; and that it should be possible to find ways and means to bridge the gap between this amorphous, as yet uncreated thought, and its expression" (65).

Over time, however, Artaud began to suspect that it was not he "who was deficient in his inability to express his feelings and turn them into 'thoughts,' words, language," but that "it was language itself which was incapable of expressing them adequately" (Esslin 67).[10] The apparent ease with which other poets wielded words no longer caused Artaud to suspect that his own mind

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> divers, et capables de bien mettre au jour toutes les attitudes, toutes les nuances d'une très sensible et pénétrante pensée. ("Toute l'écriture est de la cochonnerie," *OC* 1: 96)

[9] Je souffre d'une effroyable maladie de l'esprit. Ma pensée m'abandonne à tous les degrés. Depuis le fait simple de la pensée jusqu'au fait extérieur de sa matérialisation dans les mots. Mots, formes de phrases, directions intérieures de la pensée, réactions simples de l'esprit, je suis à la poursuite constante de mon être intellectuel. ("Correspondance avec Jacques Rivière," *OC* 1: 20).

[10] As R. J. Cambell writes, "it was not so much that [Artaud] failed as a poet, but rather that, as a medium, poetry failed *him*" ("On saying the unsayable" 69).

was diseased, but rather evinced for him the "intellectual laziness and . . . lack of integrity" of others (67). He began to show contempt for those who, "Instead of struggling for expression in suffering and torment, as was his lot . . . seemed simply to use ready-made formulations which they merely permutated in an endless series of facile re-arrangements" (67). In the hands of such inauthentic poets and writers, words were emptied of all signification and became mere commodities, signifiers without signifieds: "Words . . . had become like a paper currency without backing, conventionalised tokens that had lost all contact with the reality" from which they had been derived (67). As long as poets and writers refused to acknowledge the gap between reality and its description and neglected to seek out more authentic means of expression, words would continue to pass from hand to hand, signifying nothing.

The separation of word and thought, of reality and expression, troubling enough to Artaud, was only the tip of the iceberg; more insidious still was the fact that commodified words continued to be regarded as somehow representing reality (Esslin 67). Because writers tended to assume that language communicated truths, there was the possibility (the probability, the certainty) that empty words could and would create inauthentic thoughts in the minds of men. Artaud cites an important example of this in his poem, "Shit to the Spirit." There is, he writes, "one word, one thing . . . that's kept its ancient pre-eminence through thick and thin;" "that word and thing is spirit, / the value attached to spirit, / the value of the spiritual thing" (trans. Hirschman 106).[11] Through "a hundred 'schools' of political, philosophical or literary subversion" (106),[12] certain ideas about the spirit have persisted: the idea "that the body is the son of the spirit" (106); the idea that "the state called body . . . [is] by nature inferior to the spiritual state / and [comes] from the spiritual state" (107); the idea that "the body [is] the carriage and the spirit the mind, which [is] led by another spirit, called the coachman" (107); and finally, the idea that "the body is this filthy stuff the spirit takes its footbaths in" (107).[13] But, Artaud dares to ask, "just what is spirit? / Spirit *in fact*. / I mean, outside of philosophy" (109).[14] He comes to the disturbing and yet liberating conclusion that "spirit" is nothing but an empty word which has nothing to do with the body -- "body, and its manner of life or existence never had anything to do with / not only what is called spirit or idea, / but what we call the soul" (112).[15] "Spirit" and "soul" are mere words whose significations are completely inauthentic and thus do not correspond with reality, yet they have inspired an entire philosophical system which preaches the inferiority of the body and its enslavement to the spirit. It is then at once the simple truth and the height of understatement when Artaud writes parenthetically in "Artaud le Mômo, "the soul is nothing more than an old saying" (trans. Weaver 526).[16]

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[11] il y a un mot, une chose . . .
. . . .
qui a conservé envers et contre tout son antique prééminence,
c'est le mot et la chose esprit,
la valeur attachée à l'esprit,
la valeur de la chose esprit . . . . ("Chiote à l'esprit" 3)

[12] "cent « écoles » de subversion politique, philosophique ou littéraire" (3)

The words "spirit" and "soul," along with their significations (which have no authentic referents), are merely and yet diabolically circulated in the service of "god, pure spirit, shadow and virtuality" ("Shit to the Spirit," trans. Hirschman 111).[17] There are spirits, Artaud writes, who are "Too cowardly to try making it to a body" (111).[18] Instead,

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[13] "le corps est fils de l'esprit" (3); "l'état nommé corps . . . [est] par essence et nature inférieure à l'état esprit, / et provenait de l'état esprit" (4); "le corps [est] la voiture et l'esprit le cheval dirigé par un autre esprit dénommé cocher" (4); "le corps est cette sale matière où l'esprit prend ses bains de pied" (5).

[14] "Et qu'est-ce que l'esprit? / L'esprit en *fait*. / Je veux dire fors philosophie" (6).

[15] "le corps . . . et . . . sa manière de vivre ou d'être n'a jamais rien eu à voir, / non seulement avec l'esprit ou l'idée, mais avec ce qu'on appelle l'âme . . ." (8).

[16] "l'âme n'est plus qu'un vieux dicton" (*OC* 12: 17).

[17] "dieu, pur esprit, ombre et virtualité" ("Chiote à l'esprit" 7).

[18] "Trop lâches pour tenter d'avoir corps" (7).

> By virtue of having seen the body of man underneath them, they came to the conclusion that they were going to be superior to the body of man.
>
> By virtue of being held contemptible and repulsive by man, they've sought to give that void which is known as the spiritual state -- that castration of the body of the fathermother, that impotence in slicing through anything that has life or energy -- a kind of risky dignity which they've propped up by the most filthy kind of magic. (111)[19]

The evil demiurge has a vested interest in devaluing the bodies of men, since he himself has chosen to remain immaterial. He achieves this debasement, not by robbing the individual of authentic language, but by making empty words, catch phrases, clichés, and their corresponding inauthentic significations readily and abundantly available to each and every body. This is the spirit's "filthy kind of magic": poetic inspiration pushed to a grotesque extreme.

As Artaud writes in "Revolt Against Poetry," the inauthentic (because conventional) poet

> addresses himself to the Word, and the Word to its laws. It is in the unconscious of the poet to believe automatically in these laws. He believes himself free thereby, but he is not. There is something back of his head and over the ears of his thought. Something budding in the neck, rooted there from even before his beginning. He is the son of his works, perhaps, but his works are not of him; for whatever is of himself in his poetry has not been expressed by him but rather by that unconscious producer of life, who has pointed life out to him in order that he not be his own poet, in order that he not designate life himself and who obviously has never been well-disposed toward him. (trans. Hirschman 100)[20]

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[19] A force de voir au-dessous d'eux le corps de l'homme, ils ont fini par s'imaginer qu'ils étaient parvenus à le supérer.
A force d'être méprisés et repoussés par l'homme ils ont cherché à donner à ce vide qu'on appelle l'état esprit, à leur castration du corps père et mère, à leur carence de trancher par tout ce qui a vie ou énergie, une espèce de dignité hasardeuse qu'ils ont étayée de la plus sale magie. (7)

[20] Le poète qui écrit s'addresse au Verbe et le Verbe a ses lois. Il est dans l'inconscient du poète de croire automatiquement à ces lois. Il se croit libre et il ne l'est pas.
Il y a quelque chose derrière sa tête, autour des oreilles de sa pensée. Quelque chose est en germe dans sa nuque, où il était déjà quand il a commencé. Il est le fils de ses oeuvres, peut-être, mais ses oeuvres ne sont pas de lui, car ce qui était de lui-même dans sa poésie, ce n'est pas lui qui l'y avait mis, mais cet inconscient producteur de la vie qui l'avait désigné pour être son poète et qu'il n'avait pas désigné, lui. Et qui ne fut jamais bien disposé pour lui. ("Révolte contre la poésie," *OC* 9: 143)

Language is something larger than its individual user: it antecedes and anticipates particular speakers and writers, and therefore in a sense creates them. It offers words and empty concepts such as "freedom," "creation," "life" as substitutes for potentially authentic signs within a language of the speaker's own devising. This substitution ensures that the poet will be ensnared in the web of occidental semiotics and metaphysics in which signifiers and signifieds, like spirit and body, are never allowed to meet, and that the poet will therefore assume the universe really is structured as a hierarchy of flesh and spirit. Poetic inspiration is really nothing more than the insinuation of the Word and, as a result, of the spirit into man's physical being, and the sole purpose of this insinuation or infection of man's body is his debasement before god. Thus the idea that the poet is inspired to create a work of art is completely absurd: he is rather inspired by language and therefore by the evil demiurge to be created as subject.[21]

It was not always so; there was a time in the remote past which preceded the initial "gift" of the word and of the spiritual life that necessarily accompanied it. Artaud "remembers" this long-passed, idyllic period in the poem, "You have to Begin with a Will to Live":

> I was an old carved-up t[illegible]
> who didn't eat
> didn't drink
> didn't breathe . . . . (trans. Rattray 216)[22]

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[21] In his article, "The Language of Presence: Sound Poetry and Artaud," Jon Erickson explains this effect with reference to Jacques Derrida's notion of "nostalgia for presence." He notes that the sound poets' concern to reunite the signifier and the signified evinces on their part a "concern about origin" and a desire to return to a Golden Age in which an object or being is named in its essence (283). Without some "slippage between signifier and signified," there can be no consciousness or self-consciousness on the part of the subject; the establishment of the "self" (the soul, the ego) therefore requires the original alienation of the word from its object, the expression from its idea (284).

[22]
> J'étais un vieil arbre à rainures
> qui ne mangeait pas
> ne buvait pas
> ne respirait pas . . . . ("Il fallait d'abord avoir envie de vivre, qtd. in Greene, *Thought* 138)

When the body was flesh without knowledge of that thing called "spirit" there was peace and wholeness.[23] With the gifts of the word and of the spirit there came, perversely, the imperfection and incompletion of the body, its fecality and its mortality:

> but whole snot-feces and jissom-
> diarrhea brotherhoods
> insinuated themselves in me
> enveloping my least filament
> and setting up for themselves a sub-elemental
> cesspool life
> a perjured double of life
> which they attempted to animate in lieu of my own
> which they were ignorant of . . . . (216)[24]

Modern man was imprisoned in a repulsive, fragile, liminal body subjected to and unfavourably compared with the beautiful, eternal, whole spirit or soul. Those words that promised transcendence of the physical world in fact created the physical world with all its horrors. Even at present, they serve only to infect with gross materiality those poets who take them up without thought and without a healthy dose of suspicion and contempt.

The unwary poet is seduced too easily by the apparent fecundity of his invisible muse. God the spirit's generosity is false and deceptive since the words he proffers are empty, sterile, serving only to encourage and perpetuate man's adherence to the word and to his inauthentic dream of creation. The starry-eyed poet, flush with inspiration, has almost nothing of value to say; to use

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[23] Erickson notes: "One implication of [the myth of the language of presence] is that true meaning or identity as contained in the notion of total self-presence depends upon the *negation* of consciousness as well as self-consciousness" (284). Artaud's "carved-up tree" then seems to be a metaphor for the unconscious, unalienated "subject" in "whom" full presence resides.

[24]
> et tous les conchieurs de merde a sperme
> et de morve de merde
> se sont insinués en moi
> en ensorcelant mes moindres filaments
> et en se constituant une vie de basse fosse
> de sous élément
> un double de vie en main
> qu'ils ont voulu faire vivre à place de la mienne qu'ils ignoraient . . . . ("Il fallait d'abord avoir envie de vivre," qtd. in Greene 138)

Jacques Derrida's term, he is in a state of *unpower* which, although apparently prolific, is more silencing than Artaud's own particular, antithetical "disease of the mind":

> *Unpower* . . . is not, as is known, simple impotence, the sterility of having 'nothing to say,' or the lack of inspiration. On the contrary, it is inspiration itself: the force of a void, the cyclonic breath [*souffle*] of a prompter [*souffleur*] who draws his breath in, and thereby robs me of that which he first allowed to approach me and which I believed I could say *in my own name*. The generosity of inspiration, the positive irruption of a speech which comes from I know not where, or about which I know (if I am Antonin Artaud) that I do not know where it comes from or who speaks it, the fecundity of the *other* breath [*souffle*] is unpower. ("La parole soufflée," *Writing and Difference* 176)

The language offered up by the prompter or *souffleur* is deceptively abundant, but upon close scrutiny the individual words which comprise this language are found to be empty, as "frozen and cramped in their meanings" as is *Oedipus Rex*, the classical masterpiece (*TD* 117).[25] "[F]ixed once and for all," the other's words and therefore his texts "arrest and paralyze thought instead of permitting and fostering its development" (110).[26] This is, Artaud suggests, the ultimate goal of the evil demiurge who "obviously has never been well disposed toward" the poet. Inspiration is really nothing more than an elaborate trap designed to imprison the individual in a body of the spirit's making; it then ensures that the individual remains in the body by deadening thought with a regular supply of superficially satisfying words and phrases, works and masterpieces.

There is yet another level to the demiurge's dungeon, however. Once the individual is safely and happily installed in his little prison and all thought has been arrested and paralyzed, the *souffleur* reserves the right to change the rules of the game completely and to set absolutely everything that formerly seemed certain on its ear. Because signifier and signified are discreet and distanced entities linked to one another by nothing but convention, "Nature, in giving a tree the form of a tree, could just as well have given it the form of an animal or of a hill," as Artaud gleefully reminds us (*TD* 42).[27] Nothing guarantees the connection between the idea and its expression but Descartes' famous rejection of the possibility that God or *Logos* could be an evil deceiver -- a rejection Artaud considers somewhat hasty and ill-advised. He wonders what the consequence would have been had Nature originally paired empty signifiers with other, at present unconventional signifieds. He concludes, quite rightly, that "we [then] would have thought *tree* for the animal or the hill, and the trick would have been turned" (42).[28] More significantly and disturbingly, he wonders why this random and reasonless process of determining signification should remain safely contained in the distant past. He suggests that we could yet think *tree* for animal or hill in future. The evil magic trick could still be turned.

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[25] "tous les mots sont gelés, sont engoncés dans leur signification . . ." (183).

[26] "fixé une fois pour toutes, ils [les mots] arrêtent et paralysent la pensée au lieu d'en permettre, et d'en favoriser le développement" (171-72).

2. Christ and the Law: The Empty Word and its Powers of Seduction

In the extant English medieval cycle plays and play collections,[29] Christ's Incarnation and Passion is represented as a period in which the significations of physical signs, words, and the laws those words comprise undergo considerable if not complete alteration. Any appreciation or understanding of new meanings is contingent upon divine revelation, or depends upon a reading of the signified back into the signifier, of the spiritual back into the carnal. Human language and earthly cause and effect are shown to be unstable and unreliable sources of knowledge; thus, God or *Logos* becomes the only possible means of guaranteeing correct (spiritual) reading. Of course, the stakes are very high. The fine distinction between orthodoxy and heresy, and therefore between eternal salvation and damnation, rests upon God's gracious revelation or merciless concealment of meaning to / from the human subject.

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[27] "La nature quand elle a donné à un arbre la forme d'un arbre aurait tout aussi bien pu lui donner la forme d'un animal ou d'une colline . . ." (63).

[28] "nous aurions pensé *arbre* devant l'animal ou la colline, et le tour aurait été joué" (63).

[29] Recent scholarship suggests that only Chester and York may properly be referred to as Corpus Christi cycles. We have no external evidence (as we do for Chester and York) that the N-Town and Towneley plays were originally produced in their entirety; further, internal evidence seems to indicate that these "cycles" are conglomerations of material drawn from various (in most cases, unidentifiable) sources, and so were never written or intended to be coherent wholes. Unfortunately, we have no idea with what purpose N-Town and Towneley were compiled. They may have been constructed as performance texts, as Spector argues in *Genesis of the N-Town Cycle*, but could just as likely have been compiled as reading texts, in which case N-Town and Towneley, *as cycles*, need never have been staged -- see Epp, "The Hazards of Cycling" 136-37, and Cameron and Kahrl 63. However, since it appears that the two manuscripts were intended to approximate Corpus Christi cycles in their form, they should be able to shed some light on the cycle as dramatic genre even if they were never performed as such. For this reason, the two cycles -- York and Chester -- and the two pseudo-cycles -- N-Town and Towneley -- will be analysed and discussed as though they are identical in kind.

2.a. Signification before and after the Fall

When humankind was still in the Garden of Eden, misreading was an impossibility. This is because words and things, ideas and their expression, enjoyed a one-to-one relationship before Adam and Eve's sin and their subsequent separation from God or *Logos* (Katz 49). Most medieval and early modern theologians and "linguists" were of the opinion that the names Adam assigned to objects within God's Creation were in no way arbitrary but rather reflected or in some way expressed their very essences or natures (which Adam was able to perceive); they therefore believed "that [Adam's] naming was equivalent to knowing" (50). According to Dante, in his *De vulgari eloquentia*, Adam's naming of the animals and plants, the ultimate expression of "harmony between man and the rest of creation in the Earthly Paradise . . . shows . . . the natural affinity between rightly ordered speech and reality" (Colish 176). In a perfect world or paradise, a thing and the sign used to signify that thing are one and the same.

Adam and Eve's happy condition of linguistic perfection "prevailed until the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, when man began worldly life with a curse both upon his labours and upon his language" (Katz 50). Physical death, the division of body and spirit, was a direct consequence of separation from God; this division was further reflected in the disparity between words and things -- between signifiers and referents, between signifiers and signifieds -- experienced by the speaking subject after the Fall. In the writings of the Church Fathers, the term *littera* (letter, writing, or text) appears almost interchangeable with the term *corpus*. The "body" of Scripture is described as the word and / or literal sense of the sacred text, while its spiritual or allegorical meaning is considered to be its "soul" (Smalley 1-3). Thus, just as the original division of body and spirit led to human death, the division of word and meaning led to human ignorance and error (Katz 51). This is effectively dramatized in the York Expulsion, where God the Father, having separated himself from sinful, fleshly humankind, sends word to Adam and Eve of their punishment via an angelic messenger:

> Fro God of heuen vnto yow twa
>   Sente am I nowe,
> For to warne you what-kynne wa
>   Is wrought for you.
> . . . .
> He sendis þe worde and sais þou shale
>   Lyffe ay in sorowe,
> Abide and be in bittir bale
>   Tille he þe borowe. (20-23, 37-40)

The angel gives Adam a spade with which he will be required to "tille" his "meete and drynke / For euermore" (59-60), but neglects to explain the manner in which this object is to be used. Once the angel has departed, Adam turns his attention to the strange tool, wondering just what it is and how it is to be operated:

> A, lord, I thynke what thynge is þis
> That me is ordayned for my mysse;
> Gyffe I wirke wronge, who shulde me wys
>   Be any waye? (105-08)

Adam realizes that he must learn how to use the spade through the process of trial and error -- no one is willing or even present to tell him what to do. Resigned, he states, "How beste will be, so haue Y blisse, / I shalle assaye (109-10).

From this moment on, linear human history will be a gradual process of re-establishing right signification and understanding -- which, according to Augustine, means bringing the signifier into greater correspondence with the signified. On the subject of Augustine's theory of language, Marcia Colish writes:

> The accuracy of any verbal formulation depends on its correspondence to the object it seeks to describe: *vox sequitur rem*. The object of knowledge always remains the yardstick against which any statement about it must be measured. Statements are thus held to be not heuristic, or productive of knowledge in the first instance, but expressive of a knowledge already existing in the mind of the knower. (4).

The object of knowledge or signified is the only possible source of correct reading and so of linguistic revision. Proximity between expression and idea reflects proximity between humankind and God, between flesh and spirit, but "right reading" can only be produced by moving the first terms of these corresponding equations closer -- up -- to the second. Because man and language are incapable of producing knowledge on their own, this movement is made possible by divine revelation.

Before humanity's redemption through Christ, God's greatest disclosure of knowledge occurred when he granted the Israelites his Ten Commandments. In Chester, Moses, displaying the two tablets, orders his people: "Take theese wordes in your thought; / nowe knowne yee what ys sinne" (5.35-36). The N-Town Moses, before receiving the Commandments, offers the following prayer up to God:

> Thy wyll to werke to us, þi thrall,
>   Enforme and teche us all þi plesans.
> In purenesse put us þat nevyr mot fall,
>   And grounde us in grace from all grevauns. (6.13-16)

To this prayer, God replies: "Hooso wyll haue frenshipp of me, / To my lawys loke þei lowte, / Þat þei be kept in all degré" (42-44). Prior to this, human beings governed themselves according to specific commands given by God to certain individuals (to Noah and Abraham, for example) or according to their imperfect understanding of natural law. The Mosaic code offered the Israelites firm rules and conditions of "frenshipp" with their maker; these pertained almost exclusively to the cleansing of their flesh and therefore to the body's required movement toward spirit.

These rules and conditions were, however, of necessity incomplete before the Incarnation and Passion of Christ, the single greatest movement toward the restoration not only of man's soul (tainted by flesh) to God, but of his language to more perfect expression and knowledge. Again on the subject of Augustine, Colish writes:

> The Incarnation conveys the knowledge of God to the world by communicating God himself. It also enables man to respond to God in human terms, by restoring man's words to God in Christ . . . . For Augustine, then, God creates the world and man through his Word, and he takes on humanity in the Word made flesh so that human words may take on divinity, thereby bringing man and the world back to God. (26)

Before the end of time, before the Judgement of God and the reward of the righteous, "There always remains an opaque residuum of inexpressibility when a man tries to signify verbally his internal states of being" (25); further, faced with "the ineffable mystery of God," human language continually "labours under crushing limitations" (25). However, "In his redemptive plan, God has already solved for man the problem of his own ineffability" (26) -- at least in part. "Once joined to God in Christ, human nature is restored in mind and body, and man's faculty of speech is empowered to carry on the work of Incarnation in expressing the Word to the world" (26).

Christ's Incarnation not only renders the divine human and therefore comprehensible, it renders the human divine, grounding language again in truth, bringing it closer to the state that existed before the Fall. At all times, meaning remains unstable, God unknowable and inexpressible, because any separation from God carries with it epistemological uncertainty and therefore a need for faith and divine explication. At the time of Christ's Incarnation and Passion, however, signification appears particularly unstable and unreadable. Christ must destroy language to restore it, must give new signifieds to familiar signifiers, or reject those signifiers outright as too distant from reality, too empty of significance. Until he is dead, buried, and resurrected, human language and knowledge drifts somewhere between the certainties of the two laws, between God's two revelations of his "plesans": the carnal Mosaic code of the Jewish faith and the new spiritual law established through the Word made flesh, Christianity or Catholicism.

2.b. Semiotics of Incarnation

Resignification (and its resultant confusion) begins as early as the Annunciation. Following the biblical account in Luke (1.34), when Mary is first told in the cycles and play collections that she will conceive a child, she wonders how this might be since she has known no man: "I knawe no man þat shulde haue fyled / My maydenhode, the sothe to saye" (York 12.173-74). When the angel explains that she will conceive by the Holy Spirit, Mary is satisfied; however, her initial incredulity (or in N-Town, faithful curiosity[30]) is echoed by her husband in his various dramatized "troubles" about Mary. Joseph reads his pregnant wife's body according to conventional sign theory, and therefore reads it as an index, a sign of "natural" cause and effect, which leads him to conclude that he has been cuckolded. According to agreed-upon rules of signification, pregnancy denotes prior sexual relations, and since, as Joseph states quite adamantly, he has had nothing to do with his wife because of his great age ("I am both ould and could," he tells us in Chester 6.134), he cannot possibly be the child's father. "Sho is a clene virgine / For me, withouten blame," he states in York (13.59-60); "For me was she neuer fylyd; / Therfor, myne [my child] is it noght / . . . . Som othere has she tane" (Towneley 10.159-60, 172).

Yet before he abandons Mary in the wilderness (York 13.66-70) or alternately, retreats into the desert himself (Towneley 10.321-25; N-Town 12.111-13), Joseph wants to understand the story behind the sign, wants to know exactly "who gate hir þat barne" (York 13.73). Confronting his young wife, he demands to know just whose child she is carrying: "Whose ist Marie?" (York

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[30] Here Mary tells the angel: "I dowte not þe wordys ȝe han seyd to me. / But I aske how it xal be do" (11.249-50).

13.103); "Sey me, Mary, þis childys fadyr ho is?" (N-Town 12.36). Mary replies more than once that the child is both God's and Joseph's (York 13.103, 159, 168, 178; Towneley 10.187, 195, 204-205; N-Town 12.42, 48), which answer Joseph categorically rejects since he knows that he has not been sexually involved with Mary and (strongly) suspects that the God of his fathers has not been either:

> Goddys childe! þu lyist, in fay!
> God dede nevyr jape so with may!
> And I cam nevyr ther, I dare wel say,
> 3itt so nyh þi boure. (N -Town 12.43-46)

In refusing to acknowledge the child as his own, Joseph betrays a thoroughly conventional understanding of fatherhood -- that men beget children physically while God begets them spiritually; that a child is a physical heir of his or her human father while he or she is a spiritual heir of God the Father. Mary has of course answered with a completely different meaning. God is the physical father of her child, not Joseph. Nonetheless, Joseph will be a symbolic father, a father in name, to her child. Husband and wife are speaking the same words with completely different significations and so communication between them is impossible.

Joseph comes closer to an understanding of Mary's meaning in York when the *puellae* protest that no man has approached her "Saue an aungell" who "ilke a day anes [once] / With bodily foode hir fedde" (13.123-26). They are of the opinion that Mary's pregnancy is the work of the Holy Ghost (128-29), but Joseph rejects (his particular understanding of) their explanation -- that "Þe aungell has made hir with childe" (135) -- in favour of another -- "Nay, som man in aungellis liknesse / With somkyn gawde [trick] has hir begiled" (136-37).[31] However, when repeatedly

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[31] In N-Town, Mary's handmaiden Sephor tells Joseph that an angel has visited her mistress and has promised that she will give birth to the Son of God (12.67-70). To this, Joseph replies:

> An aungel! Allas, alas! Fy, for schame!
> 3e syn now in þat 3e to say,
> To puttyn an aungel in so gret blame!
> Alas, alas! Let be! Do way!
> It was sum boy began þis game

questioned, Mary continues to maintain that Joseph and God are the fathers of her baby, and even attempts to turn Joseph's "sign" argument against him. Whereas he has argued that her pregnancy is a clear indication of prior sin ("all þat sese þe / May witte þi werkis ere wan [evil]. / Thy wombe allway it wreyes þe," 163-65), she argues that her pregnancy is a clear indication of God's favour and blessing: "Joseph, yhe ar begiled, / With synne was I neuer filid. / Goddis sande is on me sene" (214-16). Of course, Joseph cannot help but agree that her pregnancy is a sign from God -- "Goddis sande? Yha Marie, God helpe!" (217) -- but he continues to disagree fundamentally as to that sign's meaning.

At this point, Mary recognizes that the only thing capable of ending this confusion is another sign from God. She therefore prayerfully requests in both York and N-Town that an interpretive vision, this time revealed to and directed at Joseph, might finally restore communication between husband and wife:

> Now grete God he you wisse [guide, teach],
> And mende you of your mysse
> Of me, what so betyde [happens].
> Als he is kyng of blisse,
> Sende yhou som seand of þis,
> In truth þat ye might bide. (York 13.230-35)
>
> God, þat in my body art sesyd [in legal possesion],
> Þu knowist myn husbond is dysplesyd
> To se me in þis plight.
> For vnknowlage he is desesyd,
> And þerfore, help þat he were esyd,
> Þat he myght knowe þe ful perfyght. (N-Town 12.127-32)

God must, so to speak, reveal the key to his new code before Joseph and Mary can communicate effectively, and he must do so clearly and without possibility of misinterpretation. Joseph has already encountered a number of signs which at least suggest that Mary's pregnancy is or could be out of the ordinary. For example, when Joseph first arrives home in N-Town, he

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> Þat clothyd was clene and gay.
> And ȝe ȝeve hym now an aungel name. (71-77)

remarks on the incredible -- supernatural -- brightness of Mary's face: "Me merveylyth, wyff, surely! ȝoure face I cannot se, / But as þe sonne with his bemys quan he is most bryth" (12.15-16). Some medieval theologians were of the opinion that Mary was spectacularly illuminated after the Annunciation and Conception right up until Christ's Birth.[32] This blinding illumination was in part a logical consequence of the presence of the Holy Spirit and Son of God within her body, and in part a divine blessing bestowed upon Mary to protect her, "that she should not be exposed to the heat of lust."[33] However, Mary's shining face does not persuade Joseph of her innocence; neither does, in York, his familiarity with messianic texts, for although Joseph acknowledges, "wele I wate thurgh prophicie / A maiden clene suld bere a childe," he concludes, "But it is nought sho, sekirly" (13.61-63). Signs of Mary's blessedness are there for the reading, but because their meanings are vague and contradict more familiar and accepted interpretations -- Joseph laments, "yong women wyll nedys play them / With yong men, if old forsake them; / Thus it is sene always" (Towneley 10.302-04) -- divine explication of those signs will be necessary for correct reading to occur.

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[32] They based this opinion on the text of Matthew 1.25 (Vulgate): "And he knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son" ("Et non cognoscebat eam donec peperit filium suum primogenitum"). Meg Twycross writes, "This text was one of the major stumbling-blocks for the doctrine of the Perpetual Virginity of the Virgin as, on the face of it, it implies that after Christ's birth, her marriage with Joseph was physically consummated" (52). Exegetes tried to avoid the problem by arguing that, "in this context, the verb **cognoscere** ('know') has no sexual connotations" (52). Instead, "it must mean something more like 'realise her true quality'" or more literally, "recognise" her face (52). In the *Postilla*, Nicholas of Lyra explicates the text as follows: "**And knew her not** which some explain as referring to his 'knowledge' of her face, saying that because of the presence of Christ in the Virgin's womb, there was so great a brightness in her face that Joseph could not recognise her . . ." (trans. in Twycross 58).

[33] See Paschasius' *Expositio in Mattheo*, trans. in Twycross 53. Richard of St. Laurent in *De Laudibus Beatae Mariae Virginis* writes:

> She was illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit when she was sanctified in the womb and when the Holy Spirit came from above into her. Then she was illuminated by the Son of God, the true Sun of Righteousness, whom she received and carried wholly in her heart and in her womb: nor could she not be illuminated, she who had received the very source of light into herself. Therefore she is said to be the 'woman clothed with the Sun' in Revelation 12:1. (trans. in Twycross 52)

Thus Gabriel makes a second appearance, this time to Joseph, and explains the reasons for and implications of Mary's pregnancy:

> Joseph, lett bee thy feeble thought.
> Take Marye thy wife and dread thee nought,
> for wickedly shee hath not wrought:
> but this is Godes will.
> The child that shee shall beare, iwys
> of the Holy Ghost begotten yt is
> to save mankynd that did amisse,
> and prophecye to fulfill. (Chester 6.161-68)

Joseph immediately corrects his previous misreading, and in Towneley, N-Town, and York, asks forgiveness of both God and Mary for thinking and saying "amiss." In Towneley and N-Town, pardon is freely given, but in York, Joseph's request for forgiveness is summarily dismissed. Here he is never chastised for misunderstanding the significance of his wife's pregnancy; the angel simply commands Joseph to take better care of Mary and not to leave her (13.246-47, 261), reassuring him all the while that the child she is carrying really was conceived by the Holy Ghost. Mary in turn rejects Joseph's pleas for forgiveness, maintaining that women should never presume to pardon their husbands: "Forgiffnesse sir? Late be, for shame. / Slike wordis suld all gud women lakke" (296-97). Because Joseph's misunderstanding is understandable and because he modifies his reading once informed of his error, he apparently has not sinned and is in no need of absolution.

The magi will err in a very similar way in their run-ins with King Herod, even though they initially appear to be better readers than Joseph. They correctly interpret astronomical signs of the Messiah's advent:

> Yond starne betokyns, well wote I,
> The byrth of a prynce, syrs, securly:
> That shewys well the prophecy
> That it so be,
> Or els the rewlys of astronomy
> Dyssauys me. (Towneley 14.199-204)

They are able to understand and explicate the prophetic texts of Balaam (York 16.213-16), Isaiah (217-24), and Hosea:

> Sir, þe proued prophete Ossee
>   Full trewly tolde in towne and toure,
> A maiden of Israell, forsoth saide he,
>   Sall bere oone like to lilly floure.
> He menes a childe consayued sall be
>   Withouten seede of mannys socoure [help],
> And his modir a mayden free,
>   And he both sonne and saueour. (225-32)

They demonstrate a foreknowledge of Christ's institution of the Catholic faith:

> Of all prestys he xal be rote.
> His bryght blood xal be oure bote,
> To brynge us out of bende.
>   The childe xal be chosyn a preste,
>   In all vertuys fownden meste.
>   Beforn his faderys fayr breste
> Ensens he xal up sende. (N-Town 18.46-52)

Further, they show considerable sensitivity to and appreciation of legal and political niceties when they decide to apply to King Herod for permission to travel through his land:

> *III Rex* Sirs, ȝe schall wele vndirstande.
>   For to be wise nowe were it nede:
> Sir Herowde is kyng of this lande
>   And has his lawes her for to leede.
> *I Rex* Sir, sen we neghe now þus nerhand [draw near],
>   Vntill his helpe vs muste take heede,
> For haue we his wille and his warande
>   Þan may we wende [go] withouten drede.
> *II Rex* To haue leve of the lorde,
>   Þat is resoune and skyll.
> *III Rex* And therto we all accorde,
>   Wende we and witte his will. (York 16.117-28)

Nevertheless, they are far from astute when it comes to reading the tyrant himself. For example in York, the magi foolishly agree to inform the king when they have found the infant Jesus despite Herod's initial, violent reaction to the news that the star presages the birth of a king -- "Kyng?" he asks; "In þe deueles name, dogges, fye! / Now se I wele ȝe roye [talk nonsense] and raue" (16.177-78) -- and his angry threat to flog the magi and to imprison them simply because they bring him this news -- "Fals harlottis, bot yhe hye зou hame / Ȝe sall be bette and bune in bande [imprisoned]" (191-92). Similarly, the magi in Chester promise to deliver news of the child to Herod "as sonne as ever wee maye" (8.376), even though they have witnessed the tyrant's numerous outbursts and tirades and have heard him petulantly declare:

> This realme is myne and shalbe aye,
> manfullye maynteane yt while I may,
> though hee bring with him todaye
> the devill and all his hoaste. (362-65)

Although Herod in York, on the advice of his council, has purposefully set out to deceive the magi, this hardly seems a valid excuse for their misreading of his intentions since Herod's attempts at deception are at best completely transparent. Still, the magi, like Joseph, remain unchastised; again, an angel appears and reveals to them the truth, stating simply: "Herowde the kyng has malise ment / And shappis [intends] with shame yow for to shende" (York 16.373-74); "Herodes felowshippe you shall flee; / for you, harme ordayne hasse hee" (Chester 9.228-29). Because the magi operate according to physical, scriptural, and political law as best they can, they seem not to be held accountable for their mistaken reading of Herod's unstable and dangerous character.

However, this is not the case with Herod and his court's misreading of the magi and their message of the Incarnation. Herod and his councillors are so grossly ignorant of the star as portent that the magi must inform them of its simple physical existence as well as explain its significance with reference to various, well-known Judaic texts. When the Chester Herod orders one of his "learned" advisors, a Doctor, to search the writings of the prophets for any indication that a messiah or king is to be born to the Jewish people, this advisor rashly and foolishly claims: "I trowe noe prophetes before would / write anythinge your hart to could [make cold] / or your right to denye" (8.246-48). Of course, upon examination of the texts, the Doctor finds an abundance of troubling passages, each of which Herod rejects outright. As far as he is concerned, messianic prophecies are the mere imaginings of "dreame-reader[s]," "dotardes," "sleepie sluggard[s]" (304, 305); he therefore orders the books of the prophets to be "rent and torne" (351).

Meanwhile in York, Herod can hardly contain his scepticism and scorn as the magi explain to him the star's significance, that it "makis vs speke and spir [inquire] / Of one þat is new-borne (16.163-64). "New-borne?" Herod asks;

> Þat burden hald I bad;
> And certis, vnwitty men ye wore
> To leppe ouere lande to laite [seek] a ladde.
> Say, whan loste ʒe hym? Ought lange before?
> All wise men will wene ʒe madde
> And þerfore moves þis neuere more. (165-70)

He is extremely doubtful that anyone could distinguish between "outhir kyng or knave" (180) "Be any skemeryng [glittering] of þe skye" (179), and warns the magi that he will be greatly angered if, as he suspects, their "gawdes" or tricks turn out to be false (185-86). Only when they begin to quote Scripture does Herod start to worry that they might be telling the truth, that there might be a contender for his crown: "Allas," he cries, "þan am I lorne [lost], / Þis wax ay [still] werre [worse] and werre" (234-35). There is, however, no way for either him or his council to determine the accuracy of the magi's claims, and so they must wait for final confirmation from the magi themselves. Herod's councillor advises him to

> Byde þam go furth and frendly frayste [discover]
> Þe soth of þis þat þei haue soght,
> And telle it ʒou -- soo sall ʒe traste [discover; be assured]
> Whedir þer tales be trewe or noght. (239-42)

Thus Herod and his court, recognizing that they are out of their element and that they simply cannot understand signs intended for others, rely upon those others to read and interpret in their place. Joseph and the magi also do this in their own ways and in their own contexts, relying upon the angels to explicate unexpected signs and messages; Herod then differs from them only in his final response to the truth as revealed. Instead of modifying his own reading to conform with the divine, Herod attempts to deny and destroy truth and so to make the divine reading conform with his own. In order to do this, he must first eliminate those who proclaim the truth, and so he vows to slay the magi if "thare counsaille in þis case . . . be soth" (16.264-65). Once this has been accomplished, he must eradicate the object to which both physical and scriptural prophetic signs refer: the child Messiah. Herod will not abide another contender to the throne and so will do anything to confound messianic prophesy, eventually ordering and executing the mass slaughter of innocent children.

2.c. The Ministry of Christ: "Exceding" Mosaic Law

Throughout Christ's ministry, resignification continues, not only of physical signs and events but of the Mosaic code itself. Christ acts as divine agent, revealing new meanings for old signifiers, exceeding or transcending formerly accepted readings of the Jewish faith, its rituals and its laws. These new meanings are particularly disruptive and disturbing because they affect signs only in part and appear to be assigned at random. Justification and explication of new signification always comes from above; readings of signs themselves made without benefit of divine revelation are almost without exception misreadings.

Christ's resignification of Judaic law begins already at age twelve as he disputes with the Doctors in the Temple. In York, *I Magister* upbraids the boy for presuming to understand not only "Moyses laye" but the doctors' own "dedys and sawes" (20.82, 88); he tells him, "certis sone, þou arte ouere-ȝonge / By clergy ȝitt to knowe oure lawes" (91-92). To this scolding Jesus replies, "I wote als wele as yhe / Howe þat youre lawes wer wrought" (93-94), thus dissociating himself from the the Jewish temple, its rites, rituals, and statutes. When later questioned on the subject of the Ten Commandments, Christ maintains that the entire law is fulfilled, or "hyngis," in the first two of Moses' "biddingis" (160, 159) -- a teaching borrowed from Christ's later ministry

(Matt. 22.35-40) to elaborate on the rather vague biblical account of his experience in the Temple. Unlike the Doctors in N-Town, he does not justify his particular explication of the law by using or appealing to knowledge acquired in subjects such as "redynge, wrytynge, and trewe ortografye (21.6), "gramer, cadens, and prosodye" (8), "versyfyeng" (10), "swete musyke" (11), "dyaletyk" (13), "sophestrye, logyk, and phylosophye" (14), "metaphesyk . . . astronomye" (16), "calculacyon and negremauncye" (17), "augrym [computing with arabic numerals] and . . . asmatryk [arithmetic]" (18), "lynyacyon þat longyth to jematrye [geometry] (19), "dyetis and domys þat longyth to phesyk" (20), "retoryke" (23), "canon and . . . cevyle lawe" (25), and "scyens of polycye" (26). Instead, he cites divine insight and revelation as the source of all his revolutionary knowledge and understanding:

> The holy gost has on me light
>   And has anoynted me as a leche [saviour],
> And geven me pleyne poure and myght
>   The kyngdom of heuene for to preche. (York 20.101-04)

Later on and in similar manner, heavenly inspiration will lead to the replacement of circumcision by the sacrament of baptism in the Towneley play of John the Baptist. Formerly, circumcision marked God's people as his own; however, after Christ's baptism and institution of the sacrament, immersion and the annointing with chrism and oil becomes the means by which Christians "ar sworne / To be Godys seruandys" (19.285-86). At the beginning of the play, John informs the audience that he has been baptizing disciples "In water clere" (41) -- an incomplete form of baptism, since one is yet to come who "shall do more myghtely / And baptyse in the holy goost" (43-44). Christ then appears, bearing with him the oil and cream that are to represent the Holy Spirit within the new, complete sacrament he claims is to be instituted by John:

> I com to the baptym to take,
> To whome my Fader has me sent,
> With oyle and creme that thou shal make
> Vnto that worthi sacrament. (113-16)

By baptising Christ, John will be creating a new rite or law to replace Jewish circumcision. He is well aware that Christ's immersion and annointing will set an important precedent; therefore he professes, "By this I may well vnderstand / That childer shuld be broght to kyrk / For to be baptysyd in euery land" (85-87). Yet, by his own admission, he remains ignorant of the manner in which this immersion and annointing should take place, and so confesses, "To me this law yit is it myrk" (88). "[I]f I were worthy / For to fulfyll this sacrament," he protests to the waiting Christ, "I haue no connyng, securly, / To do it after thyn intent" (129-32); "therfor, Lord," he prays, "I ask mercy: / Hald me excusyd, as ! haue ment" (133-34). In response, Christ and *I Angelus* both reassure John that God will inspire him to work correctly: "Of thi connyng, Iohn, drede the noght; / My Fader hisself he will the teche" (137-38); "My Lord has gyffen the powere playne, / And drede the noght of thi conyng" (159-60). When John finally agrees to put his faith in God, surrendering his own knowledge in order to channel that bestowed by the divine, he successfully performs the rite of baptism, the first of seven new sacraments which, John informs us, Christ "to erthe has sent" (198). In return, Christ resignifies John, providing him a physical symbol by which he will be known to future generations -- *agnum dei*, or the lamb of God:

> This beest, Iohn, thou bere with the,
> It is a beest full blyst
> . . . .
> By this beest knowen shall thou be,
> That thou art Iohn Baptyst. (209-10, 215-16).

The only other institution of a sacrament (and thus revolutionary replacement of an Old Testament rite) dramatized in the plays is that of the sacrament of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. Nowhere is the reinterpretation and reapplication of the old law more obvious than here, although Towneley's treatment of the subject is sketchy and the York *Last Supper* is incomplete.[34] In

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[34] In the Towneley *Conspiracy and Capture*, the supper proper is contained in the simple stage direction, "Then they eat, and Judus reaches his hand into the dish with Jesus" ("*Tunc commedent, et Iudas porrigit manum in discum cum Iesu.*" 20.375 s.d.). In the York *Last Supper*, a single leaf is missing from the manuscript at the point at which Christ is about to offer the disciples the bread and wine. This lacuna was probably deliberate: if *York* resembled *Chester* and *N-Town*, it likely

Chester, Christ calls his disciples to celebrate the feast of Passover for the very last time, promising in their presence to begin "another sacrifice" (15.78), one "of greater effecte" (68):

> For knowe you nowe, the tyme is come
> that sygnes and shadowes be all donne.
> Therfore, make haste, that we maye soone
> all figures cleane rejecte. (69-72).

He implies that the new law, although it breaks with the old, somehow proceeds from it, and that the Paschal sacrifice, although a mere shadow of that to be made by the lamb of God, precedes and anticipates it. This was standard Church doctrine. Augustine, in his *De doctrina Christiana* (Christian Instruction) writes that before the coming of Christ the Jews "observed the symbols of spiritual things instead of the things themselves, unaware of what they represented . . ." (125; bk. 3, ch. 6). They did this in good faith since the things themselves had not yet come to be and since, as signs, these symbols prepared Old Testament Jews to accept spiritual truths as they were revealed. Augustine writes: "In the temporal and carnal sacrifices and symbols, even though [the Jews] did not know how to interpret them in a spiritual sense, they had learned to worship the one, eternal God, and were very close to spiritual things" (125-26). Thus the symbols and sacrifices of the old law had their time, their place, and their purpose, and so were not deceptive or useless before the coming of Christ and the institution of the Catholic faith.

In the N-Town Passion, Christ pays homage to the old law by celebrating the Paschal feast *exactly* as prescribed:

> Brederyn, þis lambe þat was set us beforn
>   Þat we alle haue etyn in þis nyth,
> It was comawndyd be my fadyr to Moyses and Aaron
>   Whan þei weryn with þe Chylderyn of Israel in Egythp.
>
> And as we with swete bredys haue it ete,
>   And also with þe byttyr sokelyng [clover],

---

addressed and explained the significance of the new sacrament of the Eucharist in relation to the old sacrifice of the Paschal lamb. Any reference to the doctrine of Transubstantiation could have warranted a deliberate excision during the on-again, off-again Reformation of the sixteenth century. See Beadle's comments after line 89.

And as we take þe head with þe fete,
  So dede þei in all maner thyng.

And as we stodyn so dede þei stond;
  And here reynes [loins] þei gyrdyn, veryly,
With schon [shoes] on here fete and stavys [staffs] in here hond;
  And as we ete it, so dede þei, hastyly. (27.349-60)

Nevertheless, as he makes clear to the disciples, this is the last time the old feast will (or at least should) be celebrated, for from now on a new sacrifice and sacrament will take its place. The new feast will not exactly break with the old -- the main course will still be lamb, though the lamb will be of a completely different sort:

as þe paschal lomb . . .
  In þe eld lawe was vsyd for a sacryfyce,
So þe newe lomb þat xal be sacryd be me
  Xal be vsyd for a sacryfyce most of price. (369-72)

The celebrants will therefore continue to eat flesh, although at first glance their meal may appear only to be bread -- "Þis þat shewyth as bred to ȝoure apparens / Is mad þe very flesche and blod of me" (382-83). Continuities between the two celebrations will be maintained because the Eucharistic feast is a reinterpretation or revelation of the meaning of the Paschal, allowing all figures of God and his Son to fall away, revealing both in their infinite glory. "Now þe Sone of God claryfyed is," Jesus declares, "And God in hym is claryfyed also" (478-79).

The process of reinterpretation / revelation of the sacrifice / sacrament in N-Town is elaborate to say the least. Every element of the Paschal feast is explained in terms of its significance to the new sacrament, and this with painstaking detail. Just as the Passover was originally celebrated by the Jews "to þe dystruccyon of Pharao vnkende," the new sacrament is to be celebrated by Christians throughout the world to the destruction of their "gostly enmye," the devil (386-88). Further, as the old lamb was to be eaten with no "byttyr [leavened] bred," the new lamb is to be eaten "with no byttyrnesse of hate and envye, / But with þe suete bred of loue and charyté" (397-99). These are merely the first in a considerable list of rereadings and revisions: just as the old lamb was to be eaten "with . . . byttyr sokelyng [clover]," the new is to be eaten with bitter contrition for one's sins (401-04); as both the head and feet of the old lamb were to be eaten at every Paschal feast, Christ's "Godhed" and "humanyté" must together be consumed at every celebration of the Mass (405-12); and as all uneaten portions were to be burnt following Passover, all who do not believe in the new feast are to be cast into the fires of hell (413-16).

The list continues: according to Christ, "The gyrdyl þat was comawndyd here [their, the Jews'] reynes [loins] to sprede" is now to be understood and embraced as an allegorical "gyrdyl of clennes and chastyté" (417-18). Similarly, "þe schon þat xal be ȝoure [the disciple's] feet vpon" are now to signify "not ellys but exawnpyl of vertuis levyng / Of ȝoure form-faderys ȝou beforn" (421-23), and "þe staf þat in ȝoure handys ȝe xal holde" is to be read as a reminder to preach God's word (425-26). Christ then ends his explication of the now defunct (because reinterpreted) sacrifice by warning the disciples that they must in future be as quick to work Christ's will as they have been this night in eating the Paschal lamb:

> Also, ȝe must ete þis pachall lombe hastyly,
>   Of weche sentens þis is þe very entent:
> At every oure and tyme ȝe xal be redy
>   For to fulfylle my cowmawndement.
>
> For þow ȝe leve þis day, ȝe are not sure
>   Whedyr ȝe xal leve tomorwe or nowth.
> Þerfor hastyly every oure do ȝoure besy cure
>   To kepe my preceptys, and þan þar [need] ȝe not dowth. (429-36)

No one knows the hour of his or her own death and so, like the Israelites who were ready to flee Egypt on the evening of the Passover, Christians must work quickly and effectively in the knowledge that they too will be called from their own land of exile at a moment's notice.

Once Christ has instructed his disciples in the manner in which they are to eat the new "paschal lombe, þat is my precyous body" (437-38), he offers to feed them again, this time with "awngellys mete" (439). He tells them to approach one by one to receive the Host (consecrated nearly seventy lines earlier) from his hand, repeating to each of them the words, "This is my body, flesch and blode, / Þat for þe xal dey upon þe rode" (449-50). The reinterpretation or resignification of the Paschall feast is thus completed as the symbols of the old law are "claryfyd" into the spiritual truths of the new. All that remains to be done is that single act -- Christ's death -- that will simultaneously cement these new significations and finally do away with the old.

It is tempting to wonder what the Host actually becomes at the moment of consecration since Christ's body is very much alive at the time of its celebration. It is probably useless to do so: what God says he will do is as certain as what he says he has done, and so, in a sense, the fact that this Mass precedes the Crucifixion is immaterial. One is left with the strange impression that the Crucifixion is at once immeasurably important and significant, and at the same time, completely unimportant and without consequence. The old and new sacrifices, the old and new laws, seem to blend together throughout Christ's Passion, yet there must be a definite break from one to the other.

It is because of this ambiguity that N-Town can refer to the Eucharist as a type of paschal sacrifice, while York, with no contradiction, can forbid any celebration of the Passover at all:

> But þe lambe of Pase þat here is spende,
>   Whilke Jewes vses grete and small,
> Euere forward nowe I itt deffende
>   Fro cristis folke what so befall. (27.29-32)

Such confusion arises because Christ has come to put an end to "Moyses lawes . . . In som party, but noght in all" (York 27.25-26). The new law is, to a large degree, the old subject to massive reinterpretation, which perhaps explains the N-Town Jews' tendency to describe Jesus as not simply rejecting but rather somehow "exceeding" Old Testament law. Annas calls upon the audience to bring before him any "Hoo excede my comawndement" (26.169), making special mention of "on Jesus of Nazareth þat oure lawys doth excede" (178). Meanwhile, Herod swears that he will bring "Þoo þat excede [Mahound's] lawys be ony errour, / To þe most xamefullest deth" (29.60-61), confessing that he is particularly anxious to get his hands on "Jesus of

Nazareth," who is just such a heretic (63-64). Stephen Spector glosses the word "excede" to mean "transgress" in the passages cited above, but it seems likely that the word in these contexts at least suggests its other meanings. According to Kurath and Kuhn's *Middle English Dictionary*, to excede is "To extend beyond, project . . . To go beyond or overstep . . . To transcend." Christ has gone beyond the old law, has extended, projected, transcended it. He has done away with the symbols, rituals, and laws of the Old Testament, not by literally throwing them away, but by redefining their place, purpose, and even meaning.

This selective reinterpretation confuses the Jews to no end and leads to their misreadings. Although they share a vocabulary and a history with Christ, communication with him and his followers is nearly impossible. Christ has determined that only two commandments are really necessary; that some sign or rite of inclusion to the body of God should continue to be used, but that this sign or rite should be baptism and not circumcision; that the Paschal feast will give way to another feast; and that within this feast, wine will not only signify blood but will be blood, and bread will be body. He explains, reveals these new readings to his followers and disciples, but nowhere clarifies these new interpretations for his opponents. When Christ is with the Jews, he is nearly silent, as will be discussed in the following section. Thus, they are left to draw their own conclusions concerning Christ's "orthodoxy" from their knowledge of the law alone, without benefit of divine inspiration or illumination.

They therefore misuderstand and misread Christ's actions. Assuming that all those who are not with us are against us, and recognizing that Christ's teaching at once rejects and perverts Judaic law, they dismiss his preaching and his miracles as "dark dedis of þe deuyll" (York 32.99) effected through witchcraft and sorcery. In the Towneley Scourging, Christ's three torturers rehearse and therefore recognize their prisoner's "dedys of great louyng" (235) -- the miracle at Canaan (196-201); the miracle of walking on water (202-04); the calming of the sea of Galilee (205-08); the healing of the leper (209-17), of the Centurion's son (218-21), and of the blind man

(222-30); his raising of the dead (231); and his casting out of devils (232). Although benevolent and good in themselves, these actions are rendered suspect by "iiii thyngys" that, according to the first torturer, justify and even necessitate Christ's execution:

> Oone is oure kyng that he wold be;
> Oure Sabbot-day [he defyles] in his wyrkyng;
> He lettys not to hele the seke, truly;
> He says oure temple he shall downe bryng,
> And in iii daies byg it in hy
> All hole agane. (238-43)

According to the Jews, Christ's "loving" miracles do not substantiate his evil heretical claims but rather are rendered null and void by those claims, are reduced to mere magic tricks. "He werke with wechecrafte in eche place, / And drawyth þe pepyl to his intent," Caiaphas' first adviser complains in N-Town (26.325-26). In York, Caiaphas himself informs Pilate, "halte men and hurte he helid in haste, / The deffe and þe dome he delyuered fro doole / By wicchecrafte" (30.441-43).[35]

Still, Christ maintains that both his message and intent have been clear and unmistakable from the very beginning:

> That I spake to you openlye
> And workes that I doe verelye
> in my Fathers name almightie
> beareth wytnes of me. (Chester 13.239-42)

Correct readings do occur on occasion. In the same play in Chester, a blind man healed by Christ "rightly" concludes that, because no human being was ever able to "restore a creature to his sight / that was blynd borne and never sawe light," Jesus must be God: "if he . . . were not, iwis, / hee could never worke such thinges as this," the blind man professes (221-22, 223-24). In York, the recently resurrected Lazarus proclaims in turn, "By certayne singnes here may men see / How þat þou art Goddis sone verray" (24.190-91), a sentiment echoed by Mary his sister in Chester --

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[35] See also N-town 28.131, 30.45-58.

"By verey signe nowe men maye see / that thou arte Godes Sonne" (13.476-77) -- and by Peter and John in N-Town -- "Be þis grett meracle opynly we fynde / Very God and man in trewth þat ȝe be" (25.435-36); "Þat þu art very God, every man may se / Be this meracle so grett and so meruayll!" (437-38).

However, these readings cannot entirely be credited to their human readers since God is the source of all knowledge and understanding and therefore can distinguish the heretic from the orthodox believer, the Jew from the Christian -- or not, just as he likes. As the twelve year-old Christ warns the Doctors of the Temple in N-Town:

> Omnis sciencia a Domino Deo est:
> Al wytt and wysdam, of God it is lent.
> Of all ȝoure lernynge withinne ȝoure brest
> Thank hyghly þat Lord þat hath ȝow sent.
> Thorwe bost and pryde ȝoure soulys may be shent.
> Of wytt and wysdome ȝe haue not so mech
> But God may make at hese entente
> Of all ȝoure connynge many man ȝow lech [like]. (21.33-40)

For this reason, proper readings tend to be ephemeral and unstable within human communities. As will be discussed in the following sections, even Christ's followers -- those supposedly "in the know" -- require repeated explanations and proofs of Jesus' divinity as expressed in and through his bodily Resurrection.

2.d. Semiotics of the Passion: Christ's Death and the Harrowing of Hell

Throughout his trial and execution, Christ carries the potential for two contradictory significations within his battered body. Because he is a political prisoner and victim of torture, he is an ambiguous symbol, as Michel Foucault has pointed out in *Discipline and Punish*; as sign, Christ is ready at any moment either to substantiate the truth of his crime and rectitude of his accusers, or the falsity of the charges against him and thus error or malice of his judges (46).

History bears witness to which of these two significations became more prevalent after his death. Christ's defeat on a purely political level came to signify victory, as he became the ultimate martyr to a cause.

Yet, his sacrifice meant more than just this. His resignification of condemnation and death had metaphysical consequence: from the moment of the Crucifixion on, physical death came to mean spiritual life, not just for Christ the individual, but for all of humankind. Thus Tertullian, writing in the third century and in the midst of the persecution of Christians, rejects all conventional (Roman) interpretations of their condemnation and punishment, reading apparent signs of defeat as signs of victory:

> But we are condemned. Yes, when we have achieved our purpose. So we have conquered, when we are killed; we escape when we are condemned. So you may now call us 'faggot-fellows' and 'half-axle-men,' because we are tied to a half-axle-post, the faggots are piled round us, and we are burnt. This is our garb of victory, the robe embroidered with the palm; this our triumphal chariot. It is right and reasonable that we do not please the conquered [the Romans]; that is why we pass for desperate fellows, a forlorn hope . . . . [However] There no reckless presumption, no desperate delusion, is to be thought of, in that contempt for death and for every cruelty. (*Apologeticus* 223, 225; ch. 50)

The Romans are quick to acknowledge that the man who dies for his country is courageous, Tertullian notes, and therefore admit that the significance of punishment is ambiguous and context-dependent at best (223, 225) -- yet they are just as quick to dismiss the man who suffers for his god as a "mere fool" (227). In so doing, they betray the limitations of their human intellect and understanding, for in these matters "There is a rivalry between God's ways and man's" (227). "[W]e are condemned by you," Tertullian writes, but "we are acquitted by God;" "your cruelty only proves our innocence" (227; ch. 50). Further persecution will not, as the Romans believe, put an end to the new Christian movement. Rather, public torture and execution "is the bait that wins men for our school" (227): "We multiply whenever we are mown down by you," Tertullian states smugly, for "the blood of Christians is seed" (227).

This "contradiction" central to the Christian faith -- that death means new life, physical defeat, spiritual victory -- is reflected in the structure of the biblical cycles and play collections, where Christ's passive, pitiful Crucifixion is immediately (except in the case of Towneley) juxtaposed with his aggressive Harrowing of Hell. *Anima Christi*, once liberated from the body, turns its attention to the plight of the patriarchs and recent martyrs in limbo; in mounting their rescue, Christ's soul batters down the gates of hell with the power of his word. "Attollite portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini portas aeternales, et introibit rex gloriae," Christ demands, using the words of Psalm 24.7-8 (Vulgate 23.7-9; Chester 17.152 s.d.): "Open up hell-gates anonne, / ye prynces of pyne everychon, / that Godes Sonne may in gonne . . ." (Chester 17.153-55). His entry is violent -- in N-Town, Christ proclaims, "Þi derke dore down I throwe" (33.45), while in York, the demons remark on the physical destruction of their gates, and in Towneley worry that hell itself will crumble away:

> Owte! Beholdes, oure baill is brokynne,
> And brosten are alle oure bandis of bras --
> Telle Lucifer alle is vnlokynne. (York 37.195-97)
>
> Harro! oure yates begyn to crak,
> In sonder I trow they go,
> And hell, I trow, will al to-shak;
> Alas, what I am wo! (Towneley 25.213-16)

Once inside hell, having liberated its captives, Christ turns his attack on Satan himself, whom he orders bound and thrown still deeper into hell's pit.

> Mighill myne aungell, make þe boune
>   And feste yone fende þat he noght flitte.
> And Deuyll, I comaunde þe go doune
>   Into thy selle where þou schalte sitte. (York 37.339-42)

In N-Town, Christ tells Satan that he will be tied "Thorwe blood I took of mannys kynde" (35.49). This binding will in part serve as retribution for the devil's involvement in humankind's fall from grace:

> As wyckyd werme þu gunne apere
> To tray my chylderyn þat were so dere.

Þerfore, traytour, heuyrmore here
Newe peynes þu xalt evyr fynde. (45-48)

It will also serve to demonstrate Christ's strength in weakness to both patriarchs and audience members alike. "A, Jesu, lorde," Adam professes, "mekill is þi myght, / That mekis [humbles] þiselffe in þis manere, / Vs for to helpe as þou has hight [promised]" (York 37.349-51).

As Adam points out, Christ has already made a promise, has already carefully explained and resolved the apparent contradiction between his physical humiliation and death and his spiritual victory -- or at least has done so to and for his followers, and this without resorting to allegory or figure. For example, in N-Town, he tells the apostles gathered together at the Last Supper:

Þe prophetys spoke of me,
And seydyn of deth þat I xuld take;
Fro whech deth I wole not fle,
But for mannys synne amendys make.
. . . .
For ȝow xal I dey and ryse ageyn.
Vn þe thrydde day ȝe xal me se
Beforn ȝow all walkyng playn
In þe lond of Galylé. (27.544-47, 552-55)

At the Crucifixion, as he hangs on the cross, Christ again explains the necessity of his death, this time to the Virgin Mother.

woman, þu knowyst þat my fadyr of hefne me sent
To take þis manhod of þe, Adamys rawnsom to pay.
For þis is þe wyl and my faderys intent,
Þat I xal þus deye to delyuere man fro þe develys pray. (32.149-52)

In Towneley, he asks Mary please will she "chaunge" her sad "chere" (23.503), since he dies willingly and with noble purpose:

The fyrst cause, moder, of my commyng
Was for mankynde myscaryng;
To salf thare sore I soght.
Therfor, moder, make none mowrnyng,
Sen mankynde thrugh my dyyng
May thus to blis be broght. (514-19)

He even comforts her with the promise that he will return from the grave after three short days, explaining, "On cros I must dede dre [suffer], / And from deth ryse on the thryd day; / Thus prophecy says by me" (22.443-45). With his disciples and mother, then, Christ could not be more honest and open about his fate. He hides nothing from them, and encourages them to take strength and consolation from his words.

It is another case entirely with Christ's opponents, the Jews. In the presence of his enemies, following the biblical account, Christ is at all times nearly silent; he must be "conjured" to speak in the name of "grete God þat is liffand and laste schall ay" (York 29.290, 91), and then only admits to his divinity (much as one might surrender rank and serial number), never once explaining the reasons behind or justification for his actions or explicating his intended resignification of death and defeat. In the Towneley Buffeting, Caiaphas complains of Christ's sudden and selective silence:

> Though thi lyppis be stokyn,
> Yit myght thou say 'mom.'
> Great wordys has thou spokyn;
> Then was thou not dom. (248-51)

Ironically, now that his accusers want Christ to speak, nothing can provoke him to do so, not threats of physical violence or promises of favour. Then Annas asks him a simple and direct question -- "art thou Godys son of heuen?" (361) -- to which Christ replies, "So thou says by thy steuen" (363). He goes on to promise Annas and Caiaphas that they will in future see clear evidence of his divinity as he descends to them from a clowd (365-68); however, he offers them no explanation of his current poverty and obvious physical and political weakness. His silence on these pressing and practical matters prompts Caiaphas to ask him in scorn, "Say, thefe, where is thi crowne?" (372).

In the few other instances where Christ speaks during his Passion, his words appear similarly incomprehensible and indecipherable to his opponents, either because (as above) their key or meaning remains hidden (since unexplained), or because these words are not directed toward them: his persecutors are not their intended recipients. In both the Towneley and York Crucifixions, Christ delivers two long speeches, addressed in Towneley to "you pepyll that passe me by" (233) and "My moder mylde" (503), and in York to "Almyghty God" (49) and "Al men þat walkis by waye or strete" (253). In each case, Christ discusses the spiritual significance of his suffering in plain language, yet his torturers do not remark upon and therefore do not even seem to hear, let alone understand, his message and meaning.

In Towneley, the soldiers only indicate that they are aware of the end portions of Christ's rather lengthy remarks. Thus, although he at one point declares:

> Gyltles . . . am I put to pyne,
> Not for my mys, man, but for thyne;
> Thus am I rent on rode,
> For I that tresoure wold not tyne (276-79),

the soldiers only respond to the final lines of Christ's speech:

> Bot, fader, that syttys in trone,
> Forgyf thou them this gylt;
> I pray to the this boyn.
> Thay wote not what thay doyn,
> Nor whom thay haue thus spylt. (292-96)

"Yis, what we do full well we knaw," Christ's first torturer objects (297), and his fellow concurs, adding, "Yee, that shall he fynde within a thraw" (298). In similar manner, the soldiers ignore the bulk of Christ's potentially illuminating discussion with Mary (and through her, with the audience), responding only to his call for drink:

> Blo and blody thus am I bett,
> Swongen with swepys and all to-swett,
> Mankynde, for this mysdede
> . . . .
> This suffre I for thi nede,
> To marke the, man, thi mede.
> Now thryst I wonder sore. (525-27, 533-35)

"Noght bot hold thi peasse!" the first torturer orders his prisoner impatiently (536); "Thou shall haue drynke within a resse; / Myself shal be thy knaue" (537-38). He offers Christ vinegar and gall, while the second torturer encourages Christ to continue speaking his amusing nonsense -- after all, nothing could make things worse for him now. "So, syr, say now all youre will," he invites their captive; "For if ye couth haue holden you styll, / Ye had not had this brade [affliction]" (542-44).

In York, Christ's torturers are just as oblivious of -- or rather inattentive to -- his words and therefore explication of his coming death. Initially, they do seem to pay closer attention to what their captive is saying, since they pick up on at least two concepts from his first speech in their subsequent dialogue. At one point, before he is fixed to the cross, Christ prays:

> Almyghty God, my fadir free
> . . . .
> Þou badde þat I schulde buxsome be
>   For Adam plyght for to be pyned.
> Here to dede I obblisshe me
>   Fro þat synne for to saue mankynde . . . . (49, 51-54)

In response, the first soldier exclaims, "We, herke sir knyghtis, for Mahoundis bloode, / Of Adam-kynde is all his þoght" (61-62); the second soldier in turn expresses shock and surprise that their prisoner "Þis doulfull dede ne dredith he noght" (63-64). The torturers thus demonstrate that they have understood the literal meaning of Christ's prayer, but not its spiritual import. His words have been comprehensible to a certain degree, but have failed to communicate on some higher level.

In contrast, Christ's second speech, that addressed to the audience, is just so much nonsense in the ears of the soldiers. From his newly-erected cross, he cries:

> Al men þat walkis by waye or strete,
>   Takes tente ȝe schalle no trauayle tyne.
> Byholdes myn heede, myn handis, and my feete,
>   And fully feele nowe, or ȝe fyne,
> Yf any mournyng may be meete,
>   Or myscheue mesured vnto myne.
> My fadir, þat alle bales may bete,

Forgiffis þes men þat dois me pyne.
  What þei wirke wotte þai noght. (253-61)

"We, harke, he jangelis [chatters] like a jay," the first soldier remarks (265); "Methynke he patris like a py [magpie]," the second solder laughs [266]; "ȝaa, late hym hynge here stille," the third soldier advises, "And make mowes [pull faces] on þe mone" (285-86). In the soldiers' opinion and hearing, Christ's words at the Crucifixion resemble more the pseudo-language used by animals and madmen than that spoken by ordinary men and women. They therefore dismiss his current speech as uninteresting and irrelevant, turning their attention instead to those claims he made prior to his capture and condemnation.

"Vath, *qui destruis templum*!" the second soldier exclaims, "he who destroys the temple" (273); "His sawes wer so, certayne," the third soldier agrees; "And sirs," the fourth adds, "he saide to some / He myght rayse it agayne" (274-76). The first soldier dismisses this claim as physically impossible:

To mustir þat he hadde no myght,
  For all the kautelles [spells] þat he couthe kaste.
All-yf he wer in worde so wight,
  For all his force nowe he is feste. (277-80)

In the Towneley Buffeting, Caiaphas expresses similar surprise and disbelief at Christ's strange assertion concerning the temple:

How myght that be trew?
It toke more aray [preparation]!
The masons I knewe
That hewed it, I say,
So wyse,
That hewed ilka stone. (109-14)

Both the soldiers and Caiaphas betray a limited, literal understanding of Christ's meaning. They do not realize that Christ uses the temple as a metaphor for his own body (as it is used in reference to the believer's body in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians 3.16[36]). This misunderstanding arises in part because they are bad readers, but also because the metaphor or allegory has not been explained to them by Christ. As discussed above, meaning is not generated by signs in themselves, but revealed directly to knowledge. Allegory unexplained makes no one the wiser, thus Aquinas' third justification for the use of metaphor in Scripture: "thereby divine truths are the better hidden from the unworthy" (7; pt.1, q. 1, art. 9).

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[36] "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"

In medieval biblical drama, basic "truths" about Christ's Passion remain successfully concealed from his enemies, at least until the moment of the Resurrection. Throughout his trial, signs of Christ's divinity manifest themselves but are never once explained: for example, at Christ's capture in N-Town, "*all þe Jewys falle sodeynly to þe erde whan þei here Cryst speke*" (28.92 s.d.), yet do not immediately comment on this "miracle," nor do they ask for, nor or they offered any explication of the strange event. In York, the Jewish soldiers who come to arrest Christ are momentarily blinded by a light so brilliant, it prevents them from seeing the object of their quest -- much as, in the N-Town "trouble about Mary," Joseph is initially unable to see his wife because of her divine illumination. As discussed above, Joseph does not read this illumination correctly, and must receive a message from the angel Gabriel in order to understand its significance in relation to Mary's pregnancy. It is not surprising, then, that the soldiers do not immediately comprehend the meaning of Christ's brilliance, though they indicate that they would appreciate some explanation of it: the third Jewish soldier states, "Þis leme it lemed so light, / I saugh neuer such a siȝt, / Me meruayles what it may mene" (28.267-69). Unlike the suspicious Joseph, the soldiers never receive any explication of their strange vision, and so continue in their dis- or misbelief.

Other, similar signs of Christ's divinity pass without heavenly interpretation or comment. During Christ's second trial before Pilate in York, Pilate's guards unintentionally let their standards drop at Christ's entrance into the hall, paying homage to him as they would and should an earthly king. Since Christ offers no explanation of this unusual occurrence (he speaks only eight lines in the entire play, and these on the rather appropriate subject of governing one's speech), Annas and Caiaphas attribute the soldier's actions to their traitorous dispositions (170-71). However, when new soldiers, "the biggest men þat abides in þis land" (205), are brought in to replace the old, they too let their standards fall at Christ's entrance; further, Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate are forced to rise in respect before their captive, and so must provide another explanation of events. They attribute the strange happenings in Pilate's court to witchcraft and black magic: Caiaphas explains to Pilate, "Be his sorcery, ser -- youreselffe þe soth sawe -- / He charmed oure chyualers and with myscheffe enchaunted" (288-89). This absolves the soldiers and their superiors of any traitorous compliance with Christ the heretic while it simultaneously undercuts their captive's acknowledged power, attributing it not to God but to the devil.

Alternate explanations of unusual events can always be found because miracle and magic often express themselves identically, because prophecy sometimes perfectly resembles madness or madness prophecy, and because (as Artaud and critics such as Dollimore and Baudrillard have pointed out) political power and revolution can manifest themselves in exactly the same way. In both Chester and York, Herod reads Christ's silence as evidence of insanity: in the former he exclaims, "What! I weene that man is wood, / or elles dombe and can no good . . . / or frenticke, in good faye (16.179-80, 190), while in the latter he orders that Christ be dressed in "White clothis" because they "fallis for a fonned ladde, / And all his foly in faith fully we feele" (31.351-52). Pilate in York mistakenly attempts to appropriate the very sign of his own political and metaphysical defeat, as he points to Christ on the cross as a symbol of his power:

> To dye schall I deme þame, to dede,
> Þo rebelles þat rewles þame vnright.
> Who þat to ȝone hill wille take heede
> May se þer þe soth in his sight,
> Howe doulfull to dede þei are dight
> That liste noȝt owre lawes for to lere.
> Lo, þus be my mayne and my myght
> Tho churles schalle I chasteise and cheere,
> Be lawe. (36.14-22)

Neither Herod nor Pilate can possibly understand the real import of Christ's silence and death because these are ambiguous, empty signifiers. Without prior knowledge of their signifieds -- not only Christ's divinity, but his plan to restore Creation -- both leaders must necessarily misread all of Christ's communications and condemn themselves eternally in the process.

In contrast, Christ's followers, who have received repeated, patient explanations not only from their leader, but from God the Father himself through the angel at Christ's baptism, and Moses and Elijah at Christ's transfiguration on the mountain,[37] demonstrate a good understanding of Jesus' identity and the purpose of his ministry -- as well they should. In N-Town, John comforts Mary with the thought that her son's death will bring about the salvation of humankind:

> A, blyssyd lady, as I ȝow telle,
> Had he not deyd, we xuld to helle,
> Amongys fendys þer evyr to dwelle,
> In peynes þat ben smert.
>   He sufferyth deth for oure trespace,

---

[37] This is another case of illumination explained. When Peter, James, and John first see Christ, Elijah, and Moses in the distance, they are unaware of what this vision might mean:

> *Petrus* Brethir, whateuere ȝone brightnes be?
> Swilk burdis [marvels] beforne was neuere sene.
> It marres my myght, I may not see,
> So selcouth thyng was neuere sene.
> *Jacobus* What it will worthe [prove to be] þat wote noȝt wee . . . . (York 23.85-89)

Elijah and Moses bear witness to Christ's divinity and explain the significance of his coming Passion:

> *Elias* Als messenger withouten mys
> Am I called to this company,
> To witnesse þat Goddis sone is þis,
> Euyn with hym mette [equal] and allmyghty.
> . . . .
> *Moyses* þis is þe same
> Þat vs schall fro þat dongeoun drawe.
> He schall brynge þam to blys
> Þat nowe in bale are bonne. (113-16, 127-30)

God the Father has sent this vision to the apostles, recognizing that they are "febill of faithe" (169) despite Christ's repeated demonstrations "by sygnes sere" (174) that he is the expected Messiah. Jesus informs his apostles:

> My fadir wiste how þat ȝe were
> In ȝoure faith fayland, and forthy
> He come to witnesse ay-where,
> And said þat his sone am I. (209-12)

And thorwe his deth we xal haue grace
To dwelle with hym in hevyn place.
Þerfore beth mery in hert! (32.246-53)

In Towneley and Chester, John offers the Virgin Mother an even more satisfying consolation, reminding and promising her that she will see her son again in three short days:

me master with mowth
Told vnto his menyee
That he shuld thole full mekill payn
And dy apon a tre,
And to the lyfe ryse vp agayn:
Apon the thryd day shuld it be
Full right. (Towneley 23.385-91)

[S]uster, I tell thee sekerlye,
on lyve thou shalt him see
and ryse with full victorye
when he hasse fullfilled the prophecye.
Thy sonne thou shalt se, sekerlye,
within these dayes three. (Chester 16a.339-44)

Yet these comforts do not prevent Mary from mourning, nor do they sustain the apostles in their doubts after Christ's death. Though the disciples have repeatedly been told that Christ will rise, they do not fully believe until presented with his living, bleeding body. Arguments or words are (again) insufficient. Knowledge can only come from direct experience; only then do words begin to take on obvious -- and more often than not damning -- significance.

2.e. The Resurrection

After Christ's death and before his Resurrection, *Centurio* remarks upon and interprets a number of signs seen immediately following the Crucifixion:

Þe sonne for woo he waxed all wanne,
Þe mone and sterres of schynyng blanne,
Þe erthe tremeled and also manne
Began to speke;
Þe stones þat neuer was stered [moved] or þanne
Gune asondir breke,

And dede men rose, both grete and small. (York 38.91-97)

The Centurion admits that, as signs, these events are somewhat ambiguous; he wonders, "What may þes meruayles signifie / Þat her was schewed so oppinly / Vnto oure sight?" (38-40). Personally, he is of the opinion that these events point to Christ's divinity, that they demonstrate "he was Goddis sone almyghty / Þat hangeth þore" (75-76). Yet because "Itt is a misty thyng to mene" (43), he will go consult with the "princes and prestis" (45) of the law in order to determine a correct reading not only of the unusual occurrences he has witnessed, but of Christ's death as well.

Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate offer the Centurion alternate readings of the "miraculous" events he describes. Pilate tries to convince the soldier that the dimming of the sun and moon at Christ's death was caused by an eclipse (98-102), a natural phenomenon, while Caiaphas argues that the raising of the dead "myght be done thurgh sorcery" (103-04). However, they have no explanation for the tearing of the temple veil, and so, frustrated, Annas demands that the Centurion "such speche withdrawe" (115). The soldier sticks to his original story even in the face of heavy opposition, maintaining, "All þat I tell for trewthe schall I / Euermore traste" (107-08). Just how he comes to this correct reading remains a bit of a mystery -- it is suggested in N-Town that *Centurio* and his fellow soldiers rely to a certain extent on human reason to work out the significance of "þis wark þat here is done" (34.28):

> Þer was nevyr man but God þat cowde make þis werk
>   Þat evyr was of woman born,
> Were he nevyr so gret a clerk;
> It passeth hem all, þow þei had sworn. (29-32)

However, in York, the Centurion seems to indicate that divine revelation is again the deciding factor in all correct reading. As he departs from Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate, who have stubbornly rejected his interpretation of events, the Centurion prays, "God graunte you grace þat ȝe may knawe / Þe soth alway" (38.119-20).

By this point, Pilate and his fellow leaders have, somewhat inexplicably (certainly not through "grace"), acquired knowledge of Christ's promised return from the grave. The plays thus accurately dramatize the events of Matthew 27.62-64,[38] yet never quite explain how Pilate and the others come to their knowledge. Christ never directly communicates his intention to the leaders or to their subordinates; they in turn never demonstrate any understanding of allegorical or metaphorical representations of the Resurrection such as Christ's statement to the effect that he will destroy and rebuild the temple. Their mysterious awareness of Christ's plans does not in any way convince them of his divinity, nor of his ability to raise himself from the dead; for example, in Chester, Annas worries that among Christ's many followers there might be another sorcerer capable of restoring life to his corpse, and therefore advises Pilate to prevent Christ's body from being stolen (18.59-65). Precautions are taken to prevent Christ's apostles from breaking into the tomb -- guards are posted, and, in N-Town, the grave is locked and sealed with wax (34.246-53). Still Jesus rises, leaving his tomb vacant and the soldiers behind him stunned and unsure of what to do.

Since their superiors have repeatedly demonstrated that they are hostile to the "truth," the soldiers in Towneley and York momentarily toy with the idea of lying "Oureself to saue" (26.481-82; 38.321-22); however, like the guards in N-Town and Chester, they decide to present Pilate with the truth no matter how angry -- "wode" -- he becomes (Towneley 493-94; York 333-34). After some initial irritation and hesitation, Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate surprisingly come to accept and even believe the soldiers' report: thus Annas admits, "it is soo / þat he is resynne dede us froo . . ." (York 38.407-08). Only in Chester do the leaders of the law continue to maintain that Christ has risen through sorcery -- Annas proclaims, "This foolishe prophet that we all torent /

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[38] "The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said: 'Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, "After three days I will rise again."'"

through his witchcrafte ys stollen awaye" (18.296-97). Elsewhere, they come to recognize, yet dismiss, Christ's divinity. Pilate in Towneley and Caiaphas in York lament that the truth of the Resurrection will destroy Jewish law: "Whi, bot rose he bi hymself alone?" they ask: "Alas, then ar oure lawes forlorne / For euermore!" (Towneley 26.535, 541-42; York 38.381, 387-88). Pilate offers the soldiers money to claim that Christ's body was stolen away by "X ml. men of good aray" (Towneley 26.563; York 38.421), recognizing full well (as do his subordinates) that this story is a lie. In his final words to the audience, the York Pilate acknowledges the difference between truth and falsehood, and the particular manipulation of both that has just occurred on stage, stating quite candidly: "Thus schall þe soth be bought and solde, / And treasoune schall for trewthe be tolde" (38.449-50). Pilate bases his distinction between fact and fiction on the testimony of four rather shifty knights; he accepts their version of events as true, yet chooses to present an alternate false explanation of the miracle of the Resurrection to others.

In this, Pilate's faith appears stronger than that of Christ's followers who, despite repeated revelations and explanations, will place their trust in neither physical evidence nor eyewitness accounts of the Resurrection. N-Town and Chester present best-case scenarios, but even these are pretty bad. For example, in N-Town, the disciples initially believe the report of the women who claim that Christ has risen (36.119-20); yet they cannot help but worry that his body has merely been "stolyn out of his pitt / Be sum man prevely be nyght" (161-62). In Chester, Peter manages to read the sign of Christ's empty tomb correctly, and is thus able to proclaim:

> A, lord, blessed be thou ever and oo,
> for as thou towld me and other moo
> I fynd thou hasse overcome our foo
> and rysen art in good faye. (18.397-400)

However, Mary Magdalene, even after having communicated with the angels at Christ's tomb, cannot bring herself to accept Christ's Resurrection. Although she initially appears quite excited by the angels' message, advising the other women, "hye wee fast for anye thinge / and tell Peter this tydinge" (361-62), she remains cautious, and adds, "A blessedfull word we may him [Peter] bringe / sooth yf that hit were" (363-64). Her scepticism concerning the angels' message apparently grows as she journeys from the tomb to the apostles, for, when she finally meets them, she neglects to make mention of it at all. Then she cries, "A, Peter and John, alas, alas! / There ys befallne a wondrous case" (369-70), and offers her own explanation of events in stead of the angels'. "Some man my lord stollne hase," she tells the disciples, "and put him I wott not where" (371-72).[39]

In contrast, the Towneley Mary Magdalene delivers an accurate account of Christ's Resurrection, even testifying to the disciples that she herself has "met hym [Christ] goyng bi the way" (28.5). Following the accounts given in Mark and Luke,[40] the apostles this time dismiss her message, first of all because it contradicts reason, and second, because its messenger, Mary, as a woman, is inherently evil and thus apt to lie:

> *Petrus* We may trow on no kyns wyse
> That ded man may to lyfe ryse;
> This then is oure thoght.
>
> . . . .
>
> *Paulus*[41] And it is wretyn in oure law,

---

[39] This account of events in Chester is a strange conflation of Mark 16.1-8 and John 20.1-2. In the passage from Mark, Magdalene and the other Marys are told of Christ's Resurrection by an angel, yet say nothing at all to the disciples because they are bewildered and afraid. In John, Magdalene finds the empty tomb but receives no heavenly explanation of its significance; she therefore returns to the disciples and tells them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

[40]

> Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. (Mark 16.9-11)
>
> [A]nd returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. (Luke 24.9-11)

[41] Paul is here anachronistically included in the number of the apostles -- his conversion from Judaism on the Damascus road would not take place for several years.

> 'Ther is no trust in womans saw,
> No trust faith to belefe;
> For with thare quayntyse and thare gyle
> Can thay laghe and wepe somwhile,
> And yit nothyng theym grefe'
> . . . .
> In womans saw affy we noght,
> For thay are fekill in word and thoght. (10-12, 29-34, 50-51)

Mary insists that she "sagh hym that dyed on roode / And with hym spake with mowth" (20-21), and therefore encourages the disciples, "Putt away youre heresy, / Tryst it stedfast and cowth" (23-24). Paul replies that, because her words are unstable, he and the other disciples will only believe if presented with the object of her discourse, Christ's risen body. "[I]n woman is no laghe," he tells her; "Therfor trast we not trystely / Bot if we sagh it witterly; / Then wold we trastly trow" (44, 47-49).

Paul's misogyny in part justifies his and the other apostles' problematic doubt; after all, Peter has just gone through the rather traumatic experience of forsaking his lord "For drede of woman's myght" (78):

> for a woman that there stode,
> That spake to me of frastir [at the first? in trial?],
> I saide I knew not that good
> Creature, my master. (85-88)[42]

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[42] According to Stevens and Cawley, Peter's speech beginning at line 65 (and of which the excerpt given above forms part) "is inconsistent with his preceding speeches in which he vehemently disputes [Mary Magdalene's] claim to have seen Christ" (2: 619, 69-70n). For this reason, and because the play suddenly shifts from a six-line stanza to an eight, they conclude that this supposed "inconsistency results from careless editing of two originally disparate parts" or source plays.

However, these two parts or plays are not so disparate. Peter never actually indicates that he believes Magdalene's report and therefore does not necessarily contradict himself when he states:

> Sen that Mawdleyn witnes beres
> That Iesus rose from ded
> Myn ees has letten salt teres,
> On erthe to se hym trede. (69-72)

Magdalene's words have reminded Peter of his own sin, and have reawakened his anger against women -- a fortuitous connecting theme. Later, Thomas' reluctance to believe the apostles will be compared to their reluctance to believe Mary -- again, a consistency that does not so much argue for careless editing, as for thoughtful compilation.

In a paper originally delivered at the twenty-eighth Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo ("Womans Witness"), Garrett Epp offers a possible motive for the amalgamation of

Words are unreliable at best, but become completely insignificant in the mouths of corrupt and corrupting women. For this reason, Christ must himself appear to the apostles, in order to explain (using his own singularly "stedfast" words) and to demonstrate (using his body) the fact of the Resurrection. Displaying his wounds, he tells the disciples:

> Of trouth now may ye spede
> Thorow stedfast wordys and cleyn;
> Leyf freyndys, trow now the dede
> That ye with ees haue sene. (221-24)

Thomas is, of course, not present at this first revelation of the living body and therefore of the "truth" as expressed through Christ's word and deed. The apostles' earlier disbelief is repeated and even magnified in the figure of Thomas, who does not merely dismiss the dubious testimony of women, but that of his fellow disciples. In Towneley, every one of the apostles tries in turn to convince the sceptical Thomas of Christ's Resurrection: they present him with arguments from Scripture, citing in particular the story of Jonah and the whale (28.329-36), and offer him the personal testimonies, not only of Mary Magdalene (which they themselves dismissed earlier) (409-16), but also of Cleophas and Luke (459-68), and last but not least, of their own recent experience (393-400). Thomas upbraids the other disciples, accusing them of "foly . . . That thus a womans witnes trowys / Better then that ye se" (417, 419-20), and even compares his fellows to hysterical, irrational women, complaining, "Youre resons ar defaced; / Ye ar as women, rad for [afraid of] blood / And lightly oft solaced" (402-04). He warns his friends that they may as well leave off all attempts to persuade him, since they cannot possibly succeed -- "In all youre skylles, more and les," he advises them, "For mysfowndyng fayll ye" (421-22). Only Christ's body itself,

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the two source plays, suggesting that their reviser "saw the unexplored contradiction between the misogyny of the original [text] and the truth of Mary's witness, and wished to exploit this." The compiler / reviser therefore replaced the ending of the first source text with that of the second in "a calculated attempt to undercut the perceived antifeminist authority of the church itself at its apostolic source."

because it would signify unproblematically and without possibility of misinterpretation, could convince him of the truth of the Resurrection. "Might I se Iesu, gost and flesh, / Gropyng shuld not gab [deceive] me" (423-24), he informs the disciples in Towneley; "I may nevyr beleve these woundyr merveles / Tyl þat I haue syght of euery grett wounde, / And put in my fyngyr in place of þe nayles" (N-Town 38.321-23).

It is only after Christ appears that Thomas laments his previous reluctance to place his trust and faith in imperfect words. Then he cries:

> Alas, what mevyd me thus in my thought?
> . . . .
> I trustyd no talys þat were me tolde
>   Tyl þat myn hand dede in his hertblood wade
> . . . .
> The prechynge of Petir myght not conuerte me
>   Tyll I felyd þe wounde þat þe spere dyde cleve. (N-Town 38.357, 369-70, 377-78)

Thomas implies that he should have had faith, that he should have believed sooner, as does Christ, who tells his errant disciple: "For þu hast me seyn, þerfore þi feyth is good. / But blyssyd be tho of þis þat haue no syght / And beleve in me" (349-51, translating John 20.29). Of course, the object of faith cannot be verified and therefore the act of faith expresses partial intellectual knowledge; according to Aquinas, the individual's will must supply "what is lacking to the intellect, carrying the mind into a realm which the intellect cannot chart, yet making the mind cling to the unknown God with a firm adhesion" (Colish 128). However, as evinced by the mere existence of Jews and heretics, faith can potentially be misplaced. Thus, divine revelation and grace seem necessary for true certainty and understanding, yet the human reader is always already culpable for requiring that same revelation and grace because of lack of faith. This is the inevitable consequence of original sin, which, among other things, separated the word from its meaning, expression from its truth.

2.f. Allegory and Typology: the Direction of Reading

In the Corpus Christi drama, Christ's resurrected body must clarify everything previously said or written about it; the Resurrection not only proves Old Testament "prophecy," but explains and even determines the spiritual, allegorical, and typological significance of Scripture. The Passion makes possible the "unveiling" of certain hidden truths which were formerly inaccessible to human readers. Thus exegesis becomes a process in which the written word can only be interpreted by moving back to it from meaning and thus reversing the generally accepted course of signification. As a result, it seems that the reader must obtain knowledge through grace before he or she is able to regress to a state of mere faith (or as the case may be, to a state of shameful doubt) -- this is the very reverse of Anselm's description and declaration of faith from the *Proslogion*: "I shall not understand unless I believe" (trans. in Beckwith, "Sacramentality and Dissent" 266).

The mechanics of exegesis can most easily be expressed in terms of temporal progression. From humankind's limited perspective, it appears that the historical literal or carnal (the Old Testament) cedes to the present spiritual (the New Testament) through the mediation of the Incarnation of the Word, Jesus Christ. Saint Augustine, offering the miracle at Canaan as a fitting metaphor for the relation of Old Testament type to New Testament truth, writes that "prophecy, when Christ was not understood in it, was water;"[43] at the wedding feast (Christ's symbolic marriage to humankind), this water did not so much transform into as reveal itself already to be wine. Lubac notes that, even before the miracle, "this water was not in itself ordinary;"[44] as Augustine himself explains, the wine of the New Testament was from the beginning hidden in the water of the Old.[45] Still thinking in terms of linear time, the wine then precedes the water from which it appears to be made, the subject of prophecy precedes prophecy itself, and the spiritual precedes the literal or carnal in spite of all appearances.

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[43] "prophetia, quando in illa Christus non intelligebatur, aqua erat" (qtd. in Lubac 1:143).

[44] "cette eau n'était pourtant pas quelconque" (1: 143).

Of course, history is a human construct and in no way constrains God who is outside of time. Its progression along with the gradual revelation of the law it brings is purely for the benefit of his creation, and is regulated in accordance with humankind's ability to receive and understand truth. In answer to the question "Whether the new law ought to have been given at the beginning of the world," Thomas Aquinas offers three arguments in support of its belated and gradual discovery:

> The first is because the New Law . . . consists chiefly in the grace of the Holy Ghost: which it behoved not to be given abundantly until sin, which is an obstacle to grace, had been cast out of man through the accomplishment of his redemption by Christ . . . . A second reason may be taken from the perfection of the New Law. Because a thing is not brought to perfection at once from the outset, but through an orderly succession of time; thus one is at first a boy, and then a man . . . . The third reason is found in the fact that the New Law is the law of grace: wherefore it behoved man first of all to be left to himself under the state of the Old Law, so that through falling into sin, he might realize his weakness and acknowledge his need of grace. (1106; pt. 1.2, q. 106, art. 3)

Augustine explains the progression from sign to spiritual truth in much the same way. Citing Galatians 3.24 -- "Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith" -- he writes, "The Apostle wrote that this subjection [to the old law and to the literal sense] is like that of little children under a tutor" (*De doctrina* 125; bk. 3, ch. 6).

The transition from the old law to the new does not in any way reflect God's mutability or fickleness, but instead demonstrates his perfect understanding of human needs and limitations. Christ, as the Word and therefore basis of all law, was with God at the beginning of time and will remain with him, immutable, to the end. As Augustine writes in his *Confessions*:

> your Word is not speech in which each part comes to an end when it has been spoken, giving place to the next, so that finally the whole may be uttered. In your Word all is uttered at one and the same time, yet eternally. If it were not so, your Word would be subject to time and change, and therefore would be neither truly eternal nor truly immortal. (259; bk. 11, ch. 7).

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[45] "in aqua enim vinum quodammodo latet" (1: 143).

Humankind's perception that the law and Word unfold over time (rather than underlie it) is a product of its limited temporal understanding. Yet again, this is less a liability than gracious gift, for just as the gradual revelation of God's plan for the world gently introduces men and women to the truth, it allows them (to a small degree) "to understand how history looks from the timeless perspective of eternity" (Higgins 249).

By recognizing messianic texts in the words of the prophets and by noting similarities between Old Testament events and New, humankind can "attempt to accede to an extratemporal perspective on time and eternity: God's perspective, for the medieval West" (Higgins 249). The latter process is known as figural or typological interpretation, a particular form of allegory in which a connection is recognized (and therefore established) "between two events or persons, the first of which [the type] signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second [the antitype] encompasses or fulfills the first" (Auerbach 53). A good example of a type is Moses' burning bush, which, as Christ himself points out to Cleophas and Luke in Chester, prefigures its antitype, the Virgin Mary:

> first at Moyses to beginne,
> what he sayth I shall you mynne:
> that God was a greave within
> that burned aye, as him thought.
> The greave payred nothinge therbye --
> what was that but mayd Marye
> that bare Jesu synleslye
> that man hath nowe forbought? (19.80-87)

Another good example of a figural pairing is offered by the seventh apostle in the Towneley play of Thomas of India. He reminds Thomas that Christ told his disciples

> That as Ionas thre dayes was
> In a fysh in the see,
> So shuld he be, and bene has,
> In erth by dayes thre,
> Pas fro ded, ryse, and rase. (515-19)

As Richard Emmerson points out, such figural or typological interpretations are "motivated more by the desire to find parallels exemplifying the New Testament antitype than to determine the factual details of the past" (23). In other words,

> Because theologically the Old Testament type is a shadow (*umbra*) that points to the New Testament reality (*veritas*), the historical Old Testament 'signifier' is both dependent on, and subordinated to, the New Testament 'signified'. . . . The signified determines both the identification and the interpretation of the signifier. (23)

The reader or exegete can have no appreciation or knowledge of the figure before he or she has recognized and understood that figure's fulfillment. This is because, in figural interpretation,

> The New Testament narrative event is first analyzed into its key component parts -- an analysis motivated by the particular didactic purposes of the exegete; then figures are discovered in the Old Testament or other *auctoritas* which exemplify the various component parts. These types are finally juxtaposed with the antitype [the New Testament signified] to establish the relationship between figure and fulfillment. (23).

For this reason, the historical order of the two testaments should be reversed in the act of reading, as Hugh of St. Victor explains in his *Didascalicon:*

> History follows the order of time; to allegory belongs more the order of knowledge, because, as was said above, learning ought to take its beginning not from obscure but from clear things, and from things which are better known. The consequence of this is that the New Testament, in which the evident truth is preached, is, in this study, placed before the Old, in which the same truth is announced in a hidden manner, shrouded in figures. (trans. in Emmerson 12)

An appreciation of antitype, of spiritual truth, and thus of the fruits of allegorical interpretation allows the reader to understand the significance of old and obscure signs. However, in the end, this knowledge is of little importance, since, once the antitype or spirit of the new law has been manifested and recognized, the type or letter of the old is effectively emptied of all significance and can be "dismissed" (12).

Because in the exegete's or allegorist's hands a primary text "becomes something other" (Owens 69), he or she is not only "attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete" -- in other words, to the dead or dying ruin (70, 71) -- he or she completes that very fragmentation, death and decay, and thus ruination of the primary text. Although the allegorical impulse is to restore something lost in the past, something that remains absent and implies lack (68; Harries 84), the act itself is more one of replacement than restoration, for "allegory is not hermeneutics" (Owens 69). Instead of inventing his or her own images, the allegorical exegete confiscates those of the ruin (69), and does so more often than not to demonstrate the antiquity and authority of his or her own particular message; still, the process remains one of invention, since he or she "[rewrites] a primary text in terms of its figural meaning" (69). The allegorist "adds another meaning to the image" but "does so only to replace" (69). Thus, the less current, the less dynamic, the less immediate the original signification has become, the more amenable to allegorical reinterpretation the primary work or "ruin" will be.

Nonetheless, the act of "unveiling" a text's prior meaning is often proffered as an appropriate metaphor for the act of reading allegorically (Copeland and Melville 169-70). However, the veil the allegorist claims to remove "itself is necessarily a belated addition to the text, so that the cause or prior meaning revealed beneath it is in fact the belated result of the veil" (171). "Thus the 'veil' supplied after the text becomes the prior cause of any meaning that it delivers up" (171), and therefore a "reversal of the temporal order of writer and reader" (175) occurs in which "Responsibility for producing meaning [shifts] to the reader" (173). Figural and allegorical exegesis, by proposing to save the text, actually preempts it, "substituting itself as dynamic intentionality which acts not on the text but through it" (172).

Richard Emmerson cites the N-Town play of Cleophas and Luke as a perfect illustration of this process of figural, allegorical, or "spiritual" reading. In this play, Christ, newly resurrected and travelling incognito, meets two of the apostles as they journey "To þe castel of Emawus" (3). Not recognizing their lord, Cleophas and Luke relate the particulars of Christ's death and subsequent disappearance to their strange travelling companion, informing him of the women's discovery of the empty tomb and, in their opinion, fantastic tale of "an aungell" that "seyd to them thre / That he [Christ] xuld leve with brest ful bolde" (83-84). As Emmerson notes, the disguised Christ immediately "chides the two disciples for their failure of trust" not only in the words of the women, but in the "figural prophecies of the Old Testament" (27) as follows:

> A, ȝe fonnys [fools] and slought [slow] of herte
> For to beleve in Holy Scrypture!
> Haue not prophetys with wurdys smerte
> Spoke the tokenys in sygnifure [signification]
> That Cryste xuld deye for ȝoure valure [as payment in accordance with your value]
> And syth entre his joye and blys?
> Why be ȝe of herte so dure [hard]
> And trust not in God, þat myghtful is? (89-96)

Christ then goes on to cite three Old Testament figures or *exempla* in support of his argument that the Son of God has indeed risen from the dead (Emmerson 28). He offers Jonah's "three-day sojourn in the belly of the whale" as a type of Christ's three-day confinement to the grave (N-Town 113-20); next, he argues that the flowering of Aaron's "dede styk" in Numbers 17 effectively predicted the Resurrection, for just "As þat dede styk bare frute ful pure, / So Chryst xuld ryse to lyve ageyn" (135-36). Finally he points to the raising of Lazarus as evidence that Christ, while himself alive, had the power to restore the dead to life, and inquires of his companions, "Why may nat Cryste hymself þus qwyght [deliver], / And ryse from deth to lyve ageyn?" (151-52). The two apostles, though appreciative of the stranger's efforts, ultimately reject his arguments. "That he doth live," Luke tells his lord and master, "I trost not . . . For he hath bled his blood so red" (141-42; see Emmerson 28).

The problem, as Emmerson points out, is that typological proofs "when they are read in what Hugh of St. Victor calls 'the order of time' rather than 'the order of knowledge'" (28) are completely unconvincing. Because the literal is subjective and unstable, it can be manipulated to any end and should rightfully remain an object of suspicion, and therefore Cleophas and Luke reject the examples cited for them by the stranger. It is only when this stranger breaks their bread with his hands "as evyn on tway [in two] / As ony sharpe knyff xuld kytt [cut]" (285-86) and disappears before their very eyes (216 s.d.) that they come to realize the belated "effectiveness" of

Christ's proofs and to "accept the 'fact' of the Resurrection" (Emmerson 29). Truth is eternal and objective, yet is separate from the word, its historical means of expression. No argument -- no figure or type -- can effectively lead to knowledge -- fulfillment or antitype. However, once fulfillment negates its figure (antitype, its type), the "truth" could not be more apparent, nor human blindness to previous expressions of that truth more odious and shameful:

> Alas, for sorwe, what hap [fortune] was this?
> Whan he dyd walke with vs in way,
> He prevyd by Scripture ryght wel, iwys,
> Þat he was resyn from vndyr clay.
> We trustyd hym not, but evyr seyd nay --
> Alas, for shame, why seyd we so?
> He is resyn to lyve þis day;
> Out of his grave oure Lord is go! (225-32; see Emerson 29)

Just like Thomas, Cleophas and Luke reject all "proofs" of the Resurrection as unreliable because unstable, and again like Thomas, they experience retroactive feelings of guilt and remorse for a misreading they seem unable to avoid. Their trust in human reason and complacent attitude toward language -- therefore their belief that death is irreversible and its signification unchangeable -- ensnares them in a trap not entirely of their own making. God the Father along with the Word, as guarantors of signification, seem in part responsible, especially since they are represented elsewhere in the drama as intentionally deceiving those readers whom they consider unworthy of knowledge. For example, at the Harrowing of Hell in York, Satan dismisses Christ's claim that he has come at his Father's behest in order to liberate the souls confined in the devil's dungeon. "Thy fadir knewe I wele be sight," Satan retorts; "He was a write [carpenter] his mette to wynne, / And Marie me menys þi modir hight . . ." (229-31). When Christ corrects Satan, informing him that his true father "wonnys in heuen on hight" (235), Satan is dumbfounded: "But þou has leued ay like a ladde," he protests, "And in sorowe as a symple knave" (243-44). This, Christ explains, was a mere deception "for to make þe mased and madde" (247); the Son of God hid his origin and thus divinity within an apparently conventional (sexual) human relationship in order that his divinity "schulde noȝt be kidde / To þe [Satan] nor to none of thyne" (251-52). In this particular instance, the divine relies upon and even encourages conventional reading, lulling the fallen angels into a state of linguistic and rational complacency that makes them highly susceptible to misreading and error.

Thus the demons in hell appear naïvely secure in their understanding of Scripture. In N-Town, Satan is convinced that Christ, even if he is the Son of God, cannot liberate the souls from hell because to do so would be to contradict the divine word. "He xal fayle of hese intent and purpose also, / Be þis tyxt of holde remembryd to myn intencyon," Satan reassures his fellows: "Quia in inferno nulla est redempcio" -- "Because in hell there is no redemption" (26.46-48). To this the York Satan adds:

> Salamon saide in his sawes
>   Þat whoso enteres helle withynne
> Shall neuer come oute, þus clerkis knawes
> . . . .
>   Job, þi seruaunte, also
>   Þus in his tyme gune telle
>   Þat nowthir frende nor foo
>   Shulde fynde reles in helle. (37.281-83, 285-88)

Here Satan involves himself in a rather risky business, arguing the finer points of signification with the Word, who determines signification through his very being and actions. Christ is not governed or controlled by the signifier, but himself decides and defines the signifier's signified, the figure's fulfillment, and the type's antitype. Thus, in answer to Satan's argument, the Word made flesh simply replies that the demon has incorrectly interpreted the word "inferno" or hell as it appears in the writings of Job:

> He saide full soth þat schall þou see,
>   Þat in helle may be no reles,
> But of þat place þan preched he
>   Where synffull care schall euere encrees.
> And in þat bale ay schall þou be
>   Whare sorowes sere schal neuer sesse . . . . (289-94)

Christ fixes this unanticipated signified and / or referent to the text by binding Satan and throwing him deeper "into helle pitte" (348). As consolation, the demon is offered Christ's word or promise that all those who in future break the law will descend into hell -- a promise with which Satan seems pleased, if he remains somewhat wary. "Nowe here my hande, I halde me paied, / Þis poynte is playnly for oure prowe," he tells Jesus, and then adds: "*If þis be sothe þat þou hast saide*, / We schall haue moo þanne we haue nowe" (325-28, emphasis added). Satan's scepticism is of course understandable. It seems that even in the depths of fiery hell the old adage applies: "Once burned, twice shy."

Satan appears to realize that attachment to words and to one's necessarily limited understanding of words is very dangerous. Knowledge comes only from above, and therefore the individual's participation in (because comprehension of) orthodoxy is completely at the whim of God. Still, responsibility and therefore guilt for misreading must be assigned to the reader himself or herself, who is simultaneously denounced as being incapable of correct interpretation and as being deliberately perverse, at once unable and unwilling to ascertain spiritual truths.

2.g. The Problem of Reading: the Jew

This imperfect reader is epitomized in the figure of the "perfidious" medieval Jew, who is described in various sources as being at once blind to, yet somehow understanding and rejecting, Christian truths. According to Augustine, the Jews' adherence to the empty sign and therefore to the literal sense of Scripture, is caused by what could be described as a congenital reading disorder: a "wretched slavery of the soul . . . to be satisfied with signs instead of realities, and not be able to elevate the eye of the mind above sensible creation to drink in eternal light " (*De doctrina* 124-25; bk. 3, ch. 6). Bartholomew, Bishop of Exeter, expresses the contrary opinion in his *Dialogue* -- that Jews are able to discern spiritual truths, yet stubbornly recognize and adhere only to the literal or carnal, as Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate all do after the Resurrection in most of the plays (see above, 141-42). Bartholomew writes:

> The chief cause of disagreement between ourselves and the Jews seems to me to be this: they take all the Old Testament literally, wherever they can find a literal sense, unless it gives manifest witness to Christ. Then they repudiate it, saying that it is not in the Hebrew Truth, that is in their books, or they refer it to some fable, as that they are still awaiting its fulfilment, or they escape by some other serpentine wile, when they feel themselves hard pressed. They will never accept allegory, except when they have no other way out. (trans. in Smalley 170-71).

By rejecting allegorical interpretations of the word, Jewish men and women perversely choose to remain in spiritual darkness. However, at the same time (as Augustine points out) their Jewish identity puts them at a disadvantage, making them naturally predisposed to misreading.

The *Altercatio Ecclesiae contra Synagogam* attempts to resolve this contradiction and therefore to justify the condemnation of the Jews for errors they seem unable to avoid. Lubac gives a summary of its anonymous author's argument in *Exégèse Médiévale*:

> after having spoken about 'perfidy' as of 'inexperience,' as of a simple 'error' which it should be possible to dispel through demonstration alone, the author ends by declaring to his interlocutor that they [the Jews] would already believe in Christ if their 'perfidy' did not impede the normal operation of their intellect. In effect, the incredulous Jews are not able to believe, as the Gospel of Saint John notes many times, but this impossibility stems 'from the corruption of their own will;' they are, in essence, 'enemies of the truth.'[46]

As Lubac notes, Jewish perfidy is "less a simple absence of faith than the antithesis of faith or an opposition to faith; it is a lack of faith in those who ought to believe."[47] Certainly the Jews, because they were and still are familiar with the figures of Christian belief, should have been and should still be particularly open to those figures' spiritual fulfillment. However, because of some willful flaw in their makeup, the Jews determine to stall their interpretation at the level of the sign, and therefore place their trust in mere words rather than in Christ himself, the Word made flesh.

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[46] après avoir parlé de la « perfidia » comme d'une « imperitia », d'une simple « erreur » qu'il devait être possible de dissiper par la seule évidence de la démonstration, l'auteur . . . finit par déclarer à son interlocuteur que celui-ci croirait déjà au Christ, si sa « perfidia » n'entravait le jeu normal de son intelligence. Les Juifs incrédules, en effet, ne peuvent pas croire, comme l'évangile de saint Jean le note à plusieurs reprises, mais cette impossibilité provient « ex vitio propriae voluntatis »; ils sont, au fond d'eux-mêmes, « ennemis de la vérité ». (1: 169)

[47] "moins simple absence de foi qu'antithèse de la foi ou qu'opposition à la foi; elle est manque de foi chez celui qui devrait croire . . ." (1: 153).

In keeping with these readings, the Jews in the biblical cycles and play collections show a particular affinity or attachment to signs and words in various forms. In so doing, they betray the (false) assumption that both signify unproblematically and somehow reveal or even constitute truth. Since, as far as the Jews are concerned, knowledge comes from below (from language), words must stand just as they are until the end of time, and therefore their laws and testament, which are comprised of stable words or signs, must represent God's final plan for his creation. As a result, the individual's ability to use words (to interpret the law, to persuade, to command) supposedly enables him or her to understand and even determine truth, and therefore allows the speaking subject to wield a tremendous amount of power.

In the N-Town Passion, for example, the Jews are noticeably concerned that words (and many of them) always precede action. During the Conspiracy, we witness two separate discussions -- one in the court of Annas and one in the court of Caiaphas -- in which Christ's fate is extensively debated and discussed, while a third is strongly suggested though never dramatized.[48] Annas and Caiaphas separately request counsel on the subject of Christ and his heresy from their teams of advisors: "Therefore be ȝoure cowncel we must take hede," Annas informs his circle, "What is best to provyde or do in þis case" (26.181-82); less than fifty lines later, Caiaphas reiterates Annas' words, telling his advisors, "We must take good cowncel in þis case / Of þe wysest of þe lawe þat kan þe trewthe telle" (221-22). Once the entire group has gathered at Annas' court, all participants in the debate are more than willing to offer specific advice on the subject of what is to be done with Jesus of Nazareth. Caiaphas recommends that Christ be instantly accused and convicted of treason "Because he seyth in every a place / Þat he is Kyng of Jewys in every degré" (305-06). Rewfyn agrees with this charge, adding boldly, "He is worthy to dey with mekyl peyn" (312), a sentiment immediately echoed by Leyon (316). Annas' first advisor, going one step further, actually specifies the way in which Christ should be executed: "Let hym fyrst ben hangyn and drawe, / And þanne his body in fyre be brent" (319-20). Annas' second advisor warns that the commons will hold them personally responsible should Christ escape and not be killed (323-24), a concern also expressed by Caiaphas' two advisors (325-32).

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[48] When Rewfyn and Leyon are approached by Annas' messenger and are called to court to participate in a larger legal debate, Rewfyn answers: "It was oure purpose and oure intent / To be with hym withinne short space" (26.263-64). The implication is that Christ is the reason why the two judges intended to approach Annas of their own initiative. Caiaphas, only twelve or thirteen lines earlier, gives a very similar response to the same messenger, and we know for certain that he wishes to speak to Annas about Christ: "It was my purpose hym for to se / For serteyn materys þat wyl provayle, / Þow he had notwth a sent to me" (250-52).

After hearing all of this counsel, Annas comes to the surprising and curious conclusion that he and his colleagues do not as yet have enough words at their disposal safely to convict and kill Christ. "We may not gyf so hasty jugement," he warns them; "But eche man inqwere on his syde: / Send spyes abouth þe countré wyde / To se, and recorde, and testymonye" (335-38). The debate itself has not appeared especially brief, nor the judgement particularly hasty, yet more evidence, more words must be gathered, written, and spoken before any action can be taken against Christ. The Jews seem to be of the opinion that words will render their opponent powerless; confronted by their sheer numbers, Annas promises, "hese werkys he xal not hyde, / Nor haue no power hem to denye" (339-40). The Jews, Pharisees, and judges therefore go off in search of a damaging and damning abundance. Words, they trust, will allow them to determine the future course of events and so to negate the threat presented to their law in the figure of Christ.

Similarly lengthy and drawn-out debates are found in all the Passion plays and sequences; however, the most outrageous accumulation of words occurs in the York text, where the Passion sequence comprises forty percent of the cycle's total length -- roughly twice the proportional length of Chester's.[49] Because its Passion sequence dramatizes roughly the same biblical events as are contained in the other cycle and play collections, new or unusual subject matter cannot account for York's excessive length; neither can long, boring "god" speeches, since Christ is as silent here as elsewhere. York does have fewer stage directions than any of the other plays (except perhaps Towneley), and as a result, deictic or gestic language[50] positively abounds, and action almost never takes place without comment. Lack of stage directions and the merely practical application of deictic or gestic language could not on its own account for all of York's length -- however, taken as part of a larger motif or theme in which the Jew is equated with or reduced to his words, it helps to explain the interminably long-winded plays of the Passion sequence in which much is said, while very little gets done.

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[49] Following Beadle's edition, taking into consideration his line estimates of lacunae, and assigning an average play length of 292 lines to the three plays we know originally formed part of the cycle but are not included in the manuscript (22A, The Marriage at Cana, 23A, Jesus in the House of Simon the Leper, and 44A, The Funeral of the Virgin), we can estimate that York may at one time have contained as many as 14 600 lines. 5 849 of these comprised the Passion sequence -- those plays stretching from the Entry into Jerusalem to the Appearance to Mary Magdalene. In contrast, the entire Chester cycle is a mere 11 075 lines in length (following Lumiansky and Mills' edition), with a Passion sequence consisting of only 2 439 lines (twenty-two percent of the entire text).

N-Town and Towneley are, of course, compilations or collections, not cycles. N-Town's "Passion sequence" was originally a self-contained, two-part Passion play performed in an unknown location on successive years -- see Spector's notes to Play 26 (2: 488) and Peter Meredith's introduction to his editorial "reconstruction" of the original performance texts, *The Passion Play from the N-Town Manuscript*. However, because they appear to have been compiled to approximate cycles in form, their general structure is offered here for comparison with York and Chester. Towneley (following Stevens and Cawley's edition and estimates of lacunae) is the longest of the four manuscripts at 16 065 lines; N-Town (following Spector's edition) is closer to Chester in length at 11 328 lines. Towneley's "Passion sequence," at 4 238 lines, accounts for only twenty-six percent of its entire length, while N-Town's, at 3 222 lines, comprises a mere twenty-eight percent of the entire collection.

[50] Deictic language refers to those words in the dramatic text that are indicative of "the actor and his relations to the stage" (Elam 72). Pointing words such as "this," "here," "I," "we," "you," are good examples, since they pertain to both the actor and his immediate surroundings and in so doing establish the scene of the play. Gestic language includes deixis and more subtle pointing. According to Garrett Epp, gestic writing directs the audience's "attention to significant onstage objects, persons, or events and [defines] necessary gestures and movements" in an attempt to control "the translation from playtext to performance" ("Visible Words" 290).

One notices a great deal of repetition from play to play, not only in terms of the information dramatized and thus communicated, but in terms of the language and structure utilized. A certain amount of repetition is to be expected in any cycle drama since audience members would likely come and go during its rather lengthy playing time -- Margaret Dorrell estimates that, if the first performance of the York Fall of the Angels began at 4:30 a.m., the twelfth and final performance of its Last Judgement would finish at about half past midnight (98), and that the playing time at any single station would run about thirteen hours, eighteen minutes (99). The audience's attention span, although undoubtedly longer than it is today, was likely not *that* long, and so gaps in each individual spectator's experience of the play had to be filled. However, again, this practical reason or motivation for repetition does not entirely explain the relentless reiteration seen within the plays of the Passion sequence. It seems that repetition too forms part of a larger theme.

In York as in N-Town, the reader is subjected to a relentless recurrence of trial and judgement scenes. However, in York, the Jews' discussions and debates are not confined to relatively short dramatic sequences but expand to fill entire pageants which consist almost entirely of dialogue. This expansion occurs in part because the process of convicting Christ, of convincing another person or oneself of his guilt, begins anew with each successive pageant; arguments are not carried or remembered from play to play or through continuous action as in N-Town, but are repeated. From the Conspiracy to Christ's second trial before Pilate, the reasons cited for Jesus' arrest and presented in evidence against him are almost always the same: Christ's enemies point out that he has called himself God, or the Son of God (26.51-54; 29.50-51; 32.82-83); he has proclaimed himself king of the Jewish nation (26.115-16; 30.461-66; 32.102-103; 33.329-31); he has presumed to state that he will someday judge his accusers (26.65-66; 32.86-87); he has performed deeds of healing on the Sabbath and has generally refused to observe Jewish holy days (26.99-104; 29.258-61; 30.418-21; 32.48, 96-97); he has practised witchcraft (29.58-59; 30.293-95, 298-300, 441-45; 33.287-90); and has promised to destroy and rebuild the temple in three days

(29.266-69; 32.92-95). Repetitions multiply within repetitions as the same, tired arguments for Christ's condemnation and death are presented in various courts, before various judges, always to no avail.

The Jews' propensity to repeat themselves also extends to the making of boasts and threats. From the Agony in the Garden to the Crucifixion, Christ's opponents regularly and pretentiously announce all that they intend to do, not only to Christ's passive body but while in its presence -- for example, just before Christ's capture, Caiaphas promises that their opponent will be taken and killed (28.207-214); the first Jew guarantees that Christ "schall banne þe tyme þat he was borne" (226); the second Jew vows that they will seek him "both even and morne, / Erly and late with full gode chere" (230-31); and the third Jew pledges that they will "spare none, / Felde nor towne," but will search for their quarry everywhere (233-35). During Christ's second trial before Pilate, another group of soldiers, incorrigible braggarts, swear that they will not let their standards drop at Christ's entrance but will hold them high, and thus will succeed where others before have failed. The second of these soldiers smugly declares:

> I, certayne I saie as for myne,
> Whan it sattles or sadly discendis
> Whare I stande --
> When it wryngis or wronge it wendis,
> Outher bristis, barkis, or bendes --
> Hardly lat hakke of myn hande. (33.246-51)

In similar manner, just before the Buffeting, the first soldier promises Caiaphas that they will beat their rebellious captive into submission -- "We schall lerne yone ladde, be my lewté, / For to loute vnto ilke lorde like vnto yowe" (29.350-51) -- while at Christ's second trial, the same character assures Pilate, "He may banne þe tyme he was borne, / Sone sall he be serued as ȝe saide vs" (33.340-41). At the Crucifixion, all four soldiers declare in turn their intention to torment Christ to the best of their ability:

> *I Miles* He schall be sette and lerned sone,
> With care to hym and all his kynne.

> *II Miles* Þe foulest dede of all
> Shalle he dye for his dedis.
> *III Miles* That menes crosse hym we schall.
> *IV Miles* Behalde, so right he redis. (35.19-24)

After Christ's death and burial, the boastful promises continue. The Jewish soldiers charged with guarding Christ's sepulchre rashly assure their superiors that they are capable of keeping the body safe and secure:

> Lordingis, we saie ȝou for certayne,
> We schall kepe hym with myghtis and mayne.
> Þer schall no traitoures with no trayne
> Stele hym vs froo. (38.175-78)

Of course, they are unable to keep their promise, since Christ promptly vacates his tomb. Their words are confounded by the Word, who determines and fixes signification through his actions, and therefore will not be constrained by the speech of any man, let alone such as these.

The reasons for the Jews' above-cited repetitions -- of legal arguments, of threats and of boasts -- are various and yet fundamentally related. In the case of Christ's successive trials and their repeated presentation of evidence, the reader is left with the impression that Christ's opponents are attempting to make their arguments more convincing by restating them; however, the simple fact that these arguments must be restated betrays their fundamental inadequacy. Repetition does not serve to persuade, but devalues the accusations levelled against Christ, and so Pilate, who is almost satisfied in the Conspiracy that Christ is guilty of treason, refuses to convict him seven plays later at his second trial. Christ is finally condemned, not by the words given in evidence against him, but by the irrational demands of the crowd. Annas' and Caiapahas' arguments thus prove empty and ineffectual despite the fact that they achieve their intended goal.

Repetition also serves to establish the humorous type of the evil Jew or tyrant and in this way contains the terrifying, unpredictable oppressor and enemy of Christianity within certain reassuring boundaries (Epp, "Imitation" 114). The Jew's tendency to boast before performing any action constrains him within an observable and subsequently predictable pattern; he is thus established as a flat or one-dimensional character and hence is less frightening than a less predictable and restricted figure might be (114). The Jews' occasional failure to make good on their repeated boasts or promises helps to undermine further the threat they pose both to Christ and the audience: their frustrated attempts to keep their standards from falling or to guard the tomb of the Son of God effectively demonstrate that their words are not always directly converted into action, and that therefore Christ's submission to those words must be voluntary. The spectator is not only comforted with the knowledge that Christ's enemies, the Jews, are predictable because dependent on the word and therefore limited to certain types of behaviour: he or she is also reassured that those same words and types of behaviour are themselves limited, contained and constrained by the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. The Jews are shown to be unproductive agents whose ability to convert word to action is completely and in all cases beyond their control. Their promises or statements of intent are therefore without significance -- are as empty and ineffectual as the arguments they level against Christ.

The Jews are, of course, only aware of this on those few occasions when their intentions are thwarted. Otherwise, they seem obsessed with the self-appointed task of putting words into action, or more generally, of surrounding action with words. Their repeated boasts form only part of this larger pattern and most striking repetition, in or through which the Jews attempt to determine, control, and contain behaviour, events, and even the "truth" itself. Ironically, their obsession with words makes evident their subjection to words. Setting out to understand and control events in their immediate vicinity, they instead allow themselves to be controlled and contained by their own statements.

This preoccupation and thus subjection originates with the Jews' fixation on the law, the written expression of God's (or, here, Mahound's) will for humankind on earth. That the Jews spend so much time and energy debating legal niceties evinces on their part a genuine loyalty toward and respect for the law, both Jewish and Roman. There is no indication that Annas and

Caiaphas pursue Christ for any other reason than that they fear his heretical preaching will destroy Moses' law. As in Chester, N-Town, and Towneley, they repeatedly cite this as justification for their hostility against Christ. "For he wolde lose oure lawe / Hartely we hym hate as we awe," declares Caiaphas in Play 26 (96-97), adding in 29, "Oure lawe he brekis with all his myght, / þat is moste his desire" (43-44). "[O]ure lawe were laght till an ende / To his tales if ȝe treuly attende," Annas warns Pilate in Play 33 (285-86).

Pilate in turn is forced to admit that Jesus has broken Jewish law and is therefore worthy to be punished. His only stipulation is that, since Christ has broken Jewish law, he not be punished under Roman:

> Youre lawes is leffull [legitimate], but to youre lawis longis it
> Þis faitoure to feese [punish] wele with flappes [blows] full fele [many].
> And woo may ye wirke hym be lawe, for he wranges it.
> Therfore takes vnto you full tyte [quickly],
> And like as youre lawes will you lede
> Ye deme hym to deth for his dede. (30.425-30)

Unfortunately, Jewish law (supposedly) does not allow for the execution of heretics, and heresy under Roman law (supposedly) does not constitute treason. Annas' and Caiaphas' legal motion that Christ be executed is therefore insupportable. Pilate is disgusted by their apparent ignorance of the law, and he tells them so:

> Go layke [play the fool] you sir, lightly; wher lerned ye such lawe?
> This touches no tresoune I telle you.
> Yhe prelatis þat proued are for price [are acknowledged as worthy],
> Yhe schulde be boþe witty and wise
> And legge [expound] oure lawe wher it lyse,
> Oure materes ye meve [decide] þus emel [between] you. (30.453-58)

Annas and Caiaphas are not, however, as ignorant as they appear. Their strategy is to convince Pilate that Christ is guilty of treason because he has forbidden tribute to Caesar and has claimed the kingdom for himself; he has therefore without question broken Roman law and deserves an appropriate punishment (459-467). Pilate again grudgingly admits that they are right, Christ deserves to die, but only on condition that what they report of him is true. "To dye he deserues yf he do þus indede," Pilate slyly concedes (468). The Roman is just as cunning a politician as are his Jewish counterparts.

As with many politicians and lawyers, Annas', Caiaphas', and Pilate's adherence to the law may be and probably is nothing more than a façade, but it is a façade they are very concerned to maintain. This is because they derive their authority from it: their learning in the law, their ability to teach and to judge is the source not only of their power but of their prestige. The law gives them voice, as Caiaphas declares in his opening speech to Play 29:

> By connyng of clergy and casting of witte
> Full wisely my wordis I welde at my will,
> So semely in seete me semys for to sitte
> And þe lawe for to lerne you and lede it by skill,
>   Right sone.
>
> What wyte [person] so will oght with me
> Full frendly in feyth am I foune;
> Come of, do tyte [quickly], late me see
> Howe graciously I shall graunte hym his bone.
>
> Ther is nowder lorde ne lady lerned in þe lawe,
> Ne bisshoppe ne prelate þat preued is for pris [is as worthy],
> Nor clerke in þe courte þat connyng will knawe,
> With wisdam may were [instruct] hym in worlde is so wise.
>
> I haue þe renke and þe rewle of all þe ryall,
> To rewle it by right als reasoune it is.
> All domesmen on dese [dias] awe for to dowte [fear] me
> That hase thaym in bandome [their power] in bale or in blis;
>   Wherfor takes tente to my tales, and lowtis [worship] vnto me. (5-22))

Words represent power and the ability to constitute truth, but for words to have any authority, they must ultimately derive from the law, must be grounded in something more certain. The law must always remain the initial source and final authority, otherwise statements, judgements can have no efficacy, a fact that Annas and Caiaphas recognize full well. The process is something like an appeal to a higher authority, but it is more complicated.

In her article, "Sovereignty through Speech in the Corpus Christi Mystery Plays," Rosalie M. O'Connell notes that tyrants in the cycles attempt to usurp God's power by speaking like him.

"[T]yrants realize that God's omnipotence is expressed through his dynamic word," she writes; "*this* is the manifestation of the divine, and this is the power they covet and claim" (118). Thus the York Herod (from the Magi play) infamously boasts:

> The clowdes clapped [wrapped] in clerenes [splendour] þat þer clematis inclosis --
> Jubiter and Jouis [Jove], Martis and Mercurij emyde --
> Raykand [rushing] ouere my rialté on rawe [in order] me reioyses,
> Blonderande þer blastis to blaw when I bidde. (16.1-4; see O'Connell 121)

However, O'Connell limits God's "dynamic word" to his "immediately effective utterance[s]," and so to performative statements such as "Let there be light," the power of which Herod so obviously covets. She neglects to acknowledge that God's "dynamic word" could be appropriated in another form, the form of the law, which as a written record of God's past "immediately effective utterances" represents a power that is far more enduring and much easier to harness. Unlike Herod at the Nativity, tyrants during the Passion never claim God-like powers to influence wind, rain, or any other elements. Instead, their most frequent claim or boast is that they are well versed in the law: "I am a lorde lerned lelly in youre lay" (29.4); "ȝe þat luffis youre liffis, listen to me / As a lorde þat is lerned to lede you be lawes" (31.21-22); "But loke to youre lord here and lere at my lawe -- / As a duke I may dampne ȝou and drawe" (33.4-5). The written law derives authority from its divine source, but unlike God's performative speech acts, is static and inactive, not immediately effective. Consequently, from a lawyer's or politician's point of view, it is simultaneously omnipotent and yet entirely controllable.[51] In order to derive power from the written word, one need only put that word into action. However, as a result, the law will come to an end not only if and when Christ's alternative teachings are accepted by the people, but also if and when the law is no longer put into effect by those in positions of power.

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[51] From a Christian standpoint, the law (or rather, the *old* law) was nothing better than an empty, wicked idol. Medieval representations of Jews therefore often depict them in the act of worshipping the scroll of the Torah or the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments as though the word or law was a god in itself. See Camille's *Gothic Idol* 167-193.

Since Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, and even Pilate derive their authority from the law, they must ensure that it is constantly invoked and set in motion. During the Passion sequence at least, they are not so concerned with appropriating God's "divine ability to make of the word a deed" (as O'Connell suggests, 121) as they seem anxious to make of the divine word a deed, whether this divine word is God-inspired (as it is in the case of Jewish law) or not. During Christ's trial and execution, leaders acquire and maintain authority, even determine what truth is, by judging and sentencing according to, and thus interpreting and even channelling, God's word. As discussed above, Pilate himself, though unconvinced of Christ's guilt, cannot resist claiming Jesus' body on the cross as a sign of his own legal and political "myght" (qtd. above, 137). Pilate's political and military power enables him to maintain the law, while the law in turn validates, lends "soth" to, Pilate's power. Christ's battered body appears to complete a circuit, empowering first of all the law that has condemned him and second of all the judge who has channelled this condemnation. Yet the circuit is more complicated still: soldiers and messengers are positioned between the law and its judge, and the body that is their object. Authority runs from top to bottom as through a copper wire, and then back again. At every level, it is transmitted through words which seem to circulate endlessly and which, with every turn, retain fewer and fewer traces of the divine word as expressed in its original form -- the law.

Thus, although Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate make no appearance in either the Road to Calvary or the Crucifixion, theirs is an absent presence or present absence since their authority is constantly invoked and evoked in the words of the soldiers who are charged with carrying out Christ's execution. Whereas Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate, as judges, have been concerned with converting God's (the law's) word into deed, the soldiers are concerned with converting the nearest manifestation of God's (the law's) word accessible to them -- the orders of their superiors, of those who channel the law -- into deed or action. As they set off for Calvary, the first soldier immediately reminds his fellows (and the audience through them) that Christ's death has been decreed by no less an authority than Pilate himself: "I am sente fro sir Pilate with pride / To lede þis ladde oure lawes to abide" (6-7). As far as the soldiers are concerned, there is never any doubt that this order might or need not be carried out. Christ's death has been commanded, and therefore must take place:

I Miles Why, wotte þou noght als wele as I,
Þis carle burde [must go] vnto Caluery
And þere on crosse be done?
II Miles Sen dome is geuen þat he schall dy
Late calle to vs more companye,
And ellis we erre oure-fone [too few].
I Miles Oure gere behoues to be grayde [prepared]
And felawes sammed [brought together] sone,
For sir Pilate has saide
Hym bus [must] be dede be none [noon]. (36-45)

At the Crucifixion, before they dare take any action, the soldiers again reiterate the commands issued by their superiors and in this way emphasize the inevitability of Christ's death:

I Miles Sir knyghtis, take heede hydir in hye,
This dede on dergh we may noght drawe [may not delay].
3ee wootte youreselffe als wele as I
Howe lordis and leders of owre lawe
Has geven dome þat þis doote [fool] schall dye.
II Miles Sir, alle þare counsaile wele we knawe.
Sen we are comen to Caluarie
Latte ilke man helpe nowe as hym awe.
III Miles We are alle redy, loo,
Þat forward to fullfille. (1-10)

The soldiers must execute the commands they have been given in much the same way as their superiors must interpret the law -- that is, unquestioningly, inflexibly, and without deviation. However, this does not mean that there is no room for original contributions at this level. It is true that Pilate's orders have been quite specific:

Crucifie hym on a crosse and on Caluerye hym kill.
I dampne hym today to dy þis same dede,
Þerfore hyngis hym on hight vppon þat high hill.
And on aythir side hym I will
Þat a harlott 3e hyng in þis hast --
Methynkith it both reasoune and skill
Emyddis [in the middle], sen his malice is mast.

3e hyng hym;
þen hym turmente, som tene [grief, pain] for to tast. (33.451-459)

Still, a great deal remains to be decided by the soldiers since the actual mechanics of crucifixion are quite complicated. Pilate is no help; once he has commanded that Christ be executed, he refuses to elaborate, merely ordering the soldiers to hurry and get it all done: "Mo wordis I will not nowe wast, / But blynne [cease] not to dede to ɜe bryng hym" (460-61). If Christ is to be successfully nailed to the cross and that cross is to be successfully raised on the hill, two things will be necessary. First of all, as the fourth soldier suggests when he demands, "Late here howe we schall doo, / And go we tyte þertill," (35.11-12), the soldiers will need a plan, a detailed breakdown and practical analysis of Pilate's orders -- in short, they will need more words. Second of all, they will need a leader to formulate and implement that plan. Both plan and leader will occupy an intermediary, interpretive stage between Pilate's decrees and their ultimate fulfillment.

The first soldier immediately takes command, issuing orders, offering helpful advice, asking the other soldiers for periodic updates on how the work is progressing, and most importantly, delegating the bulk of the physical labour to his disgruntled fellows.[52] He assumes a place at Christ's head (87) from which he can observe the other soldiers' movements and can improvise any action required to fulfill Pilate's commands, but not specified in or by them. For example, when the first soldier asks the third to say how things are going at his end -- "Saie sir, howe do we þore?" (105) -- the third soldier replies that the situation is not good, that Christ's hand reaches a foot or more short of the bore (107). While the second, third, and fourth soldiers all agree that the hole has been measured or drilled incorrectly, they are unable to determine how they might correct this problem. The first soldier must save the day, must come up with a solution, and he does. He asks the others, "Why carpe ɜe so?" and orders, "Faste on a corde / And tugge hym to, by toppe and taile" (113-14). A mere twelve lines later, his fellow soldiers are stumped a second time by exactly the same problem when Christ's feet will not reach the hole drilled for them in advance. If the first soldier's speech betrays a certain amount of frustration as he offers his subordinates the same advice, it is perhaps understandable:

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[52] At one point, the third soldier complains to the first: "3a, þou comaundis lightly as a lorde; / Come helpe to haale [pull], with ille haile" (35.115-16).

> A, pees man, for Mahounde,
> Latte no man wotte [learn of] þat wondir,
> A roope schall rugge hym doun
> Yf all his synnous go asoundre. (129-32)

Thanks to this counsel, Christ is finally secured to the cross -- but the first soldier's role as leader does not end here. He must still ensure that Pilate's orders are carried out and are carried out *to the letter*. The fourth soldier, eager to bring word to their superiors and to let them know how they have fared, offers prematurely to act as messenger: "I wille go saie to oure soueraynes / Of all þis werkis howe we haue wrought" (151-52). The first soldier is forced to rein in his fellow by reminding him that a great deal of work remains to be done:

> Nay sirs, anothir thyng
> Fallis firste to youe and me,
> Þei badde we schulde hym hyng
> On heghte þat men myght see. (153-56).

The other soldiers agree that they were so commanded -- "We woote wele so ther wordes wore" (157) -- but are worried that they will be doing their own bodies harm by fulfilling this order -- "But sir, þat dede will do vs dere" (158). "It may not mede for to moote [argue] more," the first soldier answers; what Pilate has decreed must be performed, and thus "Þis harlotte muste be hanged here" (159-160). Since their task "muste be done, withouten drede" (173), the first soldier simply orders his fellows, "loke ȝe be redy" (174). They lift up the cross (not without difficulty, since Christ "weyes a wikkid weght," 213) and let it drop into the mortice (of course on the first soldier's advice -- 219-22). When the cross sways from side to side, too small for its mortice, the first soldier again saves the day by informing the others how to correct the problem:

> Itt schall be sette on ilke a side
> So þat it schall no forther flitte.

Goode wegges schall we take þis tyde
And feste [make fast] þe foote, þanne is all fitte. (233-36)

Only once the cross is secure, once all has been said and more importantly been done, can the soldiers report their actions to their superiors. Small details, such as Christ's incredible weight, will lend credibility and colour to their account of the Crucifixion, and will gain the soldiers themselves a certain notoriety:

III Miles He weyes a wikkid weght.
II Miles So may we all foure saie,
Or he was heued on heght
And raysed in þis array.

IV Miles He made vs stande as any stones,
So boustous [heavy] was he for to bere. (213-18)

Yet the account itself will serve first of all as proof that Pilate's judgement and decrees, and therefore both the first soldier's subordinate commands and the superior statutes of the law, were successfully put into action, empowering God's word and its agents in spite of (even because of) Christ's supposed blasphemy.

The soldiers are so satisfied with their work and with the fact that all of Pilate's words have been converted into action that they proclaim, "Þis race [course of events] mon be rehersed right / Thurgh þe worlde both este and weste" (283-84). Their description of events in general will complete a larger circuit of authority -- that of the law and its judges -- just as accounts of smaller details have completed lesser circuits of authority: "Sir knyghtis, saie, howe wirke we nowe?" (97). The soldiers' story will be of considerable importance since it will prove both the law's and Pilate's strength and ultimate supremacy, as well as Jesus the heretic's relative impotence. While Christ was apparently unable to convert his words into action (most noticeably the claim that he would destroy and rebuild the temple), Pilate and the soldiers were able to carry out Christ's execution with great efficiency. At the end of the Crucifixion, the first soldier points out that "Als Pilate demed is done and dight" (281). This pleases him immensely, not only because it means that he and the other soldiers were on the winning side, but also because, as he advises his fellows, it earns them the right to relax: "Therfore I rede þat we go reste" (282). Although a few reports remain to be filed, a few stories to be told, the time for word and action is finally over. All the soldiers have to do now is to wait for their captive to die.

On one level then, it appears that the Jews' obsession with law and language has served them well -- they have managed to accomplish everything they set out to do. As much as possible, they have attempted to ground their decisions and actions in the law or word of God, and have tried to control or contain events in deference to the same, assuming that God's will or intention for his creation has not altered and will never alter, but will always endure. Unfortunately, the Jews cling to their law and therefore to the word at the very moment when both are being revised. God has changed his mind, has assigned new significations to familiar signifiers, and has in this way caught the Jews out. Nothing could be more burdensome or more dangerous than an adherence to the carnal law, to words and to their previously established meanings, in the wake of the Word's Incarnation and Passion and the resultant semiotic shift.

The Jews' problem is that they have become distracted by words, have come to believe that language constitutes or determines truth, and not vice versa. As perfectly imperfect readers (and speakers), they do not understand that knowledge is attained in spite of, not by means of, reason and language, and so repeatedly decree and describe the shedding of Christ's blood without wondering what it might *mean*. They would do well to remember, as the first soldier informs Pilate's servant, that "wordis are as þe wynde" (30.236) and therefore should be considered neither cause for offense ("A, goode sir, be noȝt wroth," 236), nor, more importantly, basis for certainty or even for faith. Words, as signs, are arbitrary, subject to the changing whims of God or *Logos*. As such, they should be deemed suspect, and faith in them should be rejected in favour of divine revelation.

Yet the Jews are fascinated by words even in the presence of the Word made flesh and therefore seem, to use the old expression, unable to see the forest for the trees. The soldiers' gestic language at the Crucifixion, although practical in that it eliminates the need for stage directions, is so excessive that it becomes thematic, emphasizing the Jews' delight in detail. The soldiers dissect Christ's body with their every word, reducing him to his various limbs, veins, and sinews, and in this way, effectively reveal their own inability or unwillingness to see beyond the particulars of the flesh -- both of Christ's and of their own, for the soldiers' physical actions are coded in and therefore controlled by the deictic / gestic language of the text:

II Miles Nowe, certis, I schall noȝt fyne
  Or his right hande be feste.
III Miles Þe lefte hande þanne is myne --
  Late see who beres hym beste.

IV Miles Hys lymmys on lenghe þan schalle I lede,
  And even vnto þe bore þame bringe.
I Miles Vnto his heede I schall take hede,
  And with myne hande helpe hym to hyng

. . . .

I Miles Sir knyghtis, saie, howe wirke we nowe?
II Miles ȝis, certis, I hope I holde þis hande[.]
[*III Miles*] And to þe boore I haue it brought
  Full boxumly withouten bande.
[*IV Miles*] Strike on þan harde, for hym þe boght.
[*I Miles*] ȝis, here is a stubbe will stiffely stande,
Thurgh bones and senous it shall be soght --
  This werke is wele, I will warande. (35.81-88, 97-104)[53]

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[53] At the equivalent of Beadle's lines 101 and 102 in the manuscript, *II Miles* is erroneously listed as speaking twice in succession. Beadle (following J.P.R. Wallis) amends this section of the play by ascribing lines 98-100 and 102-104 to the second soldier. Line 101, which appears to be a command, is assigned to the first soldier because he is the leader of the group; the second soldier is evidently the one who hammers the nail "into" the right hand (see ll. 81-82), and so the next line is assigned to him, as per the manuscript. However, Beadle's amendment breaks a previously consistent pattern of numeric progression, since, up to this point, soldiers one, two, three, and four always speak in succession. If this pattern is to be maintained, the fourth soldier should be the speaker of line 101 (note that Beadle omits the manuscript heading "*III Miles*" at 99), and the first soldier should be the speaker of lines 102-104. This is the reading suggested by Lucy Toulmin Smith in her 1885 edition of the plays and is adopted above.

The spiritual significance of Christ's death is completely lost on the four soldiers, who, like children, are preoccupied with and therefore subject to the body. Their words, their focussed and therefore limited perception, prevents them from recognizing their spiritual saviour -- or, conversely, their lack of recognition of the Jewish Messiah serves to focus and therefore limit their perception. Thus the Jews are perverse in the sense that they should see and believe and yet cannot. They are also perverse in that they (un)knowingly reject Christ the Word, the very source and ultimate embodiment of the empty and ineffectual masterpiece or idol which is human language.

2.h. The Jews and Antichrist

Ironically, the "congenital" reading disorder that prevents the Jews from recognizing the true Messiah at his advent renders them particularly susceptible to the claims and promises made by false messiahs, heretics, and antichrists in his stead. The Jews' scepticism with regard to Christ translates into extreme gullibility where others are concerned; their trust in and reliance on the signifier, emptied of meaning by the Incarnation of the Word, makes them especially vulnerable to those who would exploit the ruin of the old law. It seems that the sign is particularly unstable once it becomes obsolete -- in the hands of an unscrupulous exegete, it could be given any significance. As was pointed out earlier, allegory is not hermeneutics.

Medieval theologians warn that the type or figure should be discarded after its fulfillment in the antitype, not only because at this point it is no longer useful (as implied in the ubiquitous chaff / fruit analogy), but because it actually becomes dangerous to the reader. Authorities agree that there was nothing wrong with the word, with the literal sense of Scripture or the Mosaic code, before the spirit itself had been laid bare, for at that time the letter still contained and hid the spirit, or to use Augustine's metaphor, the water still contained and hid the wine. However, after

Christ's Passion, the water of the Old Testament is not only emptied of its force, but contaminated and therefore unwholesome. According to John Scotus, as summarized in Lubac, the Jewish law "is not even pure water" any longer but "is now infected with parasitic germs;" "formerly drinkable in its historic sense, it now communicates the sicknesses of heresy."[54] The Jews, by adhering to the word, to the literal sense of Scripture, and by rejecting the New Testament entirely, make themselves especially susceptible to the seductive words of false prophets. They are therefore warned: "if water refuses to let itself be changed into wine, it will change into blood, as happened in the first plague of Egypt."[55]

In the Chester play of Antichrist, we witness in action the attraction the ruin holds for the (false) allegorical reader / writer. Following Adso's *Libellus de Antichristus*, the playwright closely and systematically associates Antichrist with the Jews, who refuse to acknowledge that their laws and messianic prophecies have long-since been realized and supplanted in the person of Jesus Christ: as the first Jewish king tells the self-proclaimed messiah at his arrival, "Wee leeven, lord, withouten lett, / that Christ ys not common yett" (23.61-62). Not only does Antichrist identify the Jews as his own race and chosen people (34),[56] he identifies himself as the Christ they expect and await.[57] "I am called the eternal prince, Christ, your saviour," he tells the assembled

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[54] "elle n'est même plus de l'eau pure: elle est maintenant infectée de germes parasitaires. Potable jadis en son sens historique, elle communique maintenant les maux de l'hérésie" (1:143).

[55] "Si l'eau refuse de se laisser changer en vin, voici qu'elle se change en sang, comme la chose eut lieu dans la première plaie d'Égypte" (Lubac 1: 143).

[56] "Antichrist will be born of the people of the Jews, according to the prophecy saying, *Dan shall be a serpent in the road, and a horned snake in the narrow lane, biting the hoof of the horse so that his rider falls backward*" ("Antichristus ex populo Judaeorum nascetur de tribu Dan, secundum prophetiam dicentem: *Fiat Dan coluber in via, et cerastes in semita, mordens ungulam equi, ut cadat ascensor ejus retro*," Adso, *PL* 101: 1292).

[57]

> Having been born in the city of Babylon, he will come to Jerusalem and circumcise himself, saying to the Jews: I am the Christ promised you, who came for your salvation, so that I may gather together and defend you who are dispersed. Then, running to him and believing they receive Christ, they will receive the devil, in accordance with what God

crowd;[58] "Messias, Christ, and most of might, / that in the lawe was you beheight . . . ys commen, for I am hee" (13-14, 16). Promising the Jews, "I shall fulfill Whollye Wrytte" (113), Antichrist proceeds to explicate Old Testament, supposedly "messianic" Scripture. Antichrist allegorizes himself into Jewish types and figures that are all the more fragmentary and empty because already fulfilled.

His exegesis of Scripture is, not surprisingly, sloppy and unscrupulous. Explaining the significance of Zephaniah 3.8,[59] Antichrist informs the Jews that, according to this prophecy, he must die and rise again from the dead, and will after his resurrection "sitt in greate renowne" (121-30). He fails to cite the remainder of this passage, in which the speaker goes on to explain that he will return "to pour out upon them [the nations and kingdoms] my indignation, all the heat of my anger; for in the fire of my passion all the earth shall be consumed" (see Lumiansky and Mills 2: 336, l. 120n.). In two other instances he misrepresents obvious references to Antichrist as messianic prophecies. His claim that "Danyell the propett before me tould, / all women in world me love should / when I were come in land" (42-44) appears to be a strange perversion of Daniel 11.37, which predicts that a future tyrannical king "shall pay no respect to the gods of his ancestors, or to the one beloved by women; he shall pay no respect to any other god, for he shall consider himself greater than all" (see Lumiansky and Mills 2: 334, ll. 42-48n). Antichrist then

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> said to the Jews in the Gospel: *I came in the name of my Father and you did not receive me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive this man.*
> [in civitate Babyloniae natus, Hierusalem veniens circumcidet se dicens Judaeis: Ego sum Christus vobis repromisus, qui ad salutem vestram veni, ut vos, qui dispersi estis, congregem et defendam. Tunc ad eum concurrent, et existimantes se recipere Christum, recipient diabolum, secundum quod Dominus in Evangelio ait Judaeis: *Ego veni in nomine Patris mei, et non recepistis me; si alius venerit in nomine suo, hunc recipietis.*"]
> (Adso, *PL* 101: 1296)

[58] "[P]rinceps aeternus vocor, Christus, vester salvator" (8).

[59] "Therefore wait for me, says the Lord, for the day when I arise as a witness. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms . . . ."

cites Daniel 11.39, "He will give them [those who acknowledge him] power, and will divide the land for profit to many,"[60] promising the Jews "hitt shalbe donne, that you shall see" (55). The text he offers is itself a perversion of the Vulgate, which reads "et in multis" instead of "et multis" -- so, according to the original Latin text, Antichrist will divide the land into many pieces and to no one's profit but his own (Lumiansky and Mills 2: 334, l. 56n.). This appears to have been a common misreading, since both the *Legenda Aurea* and Adso's *Libellus* indicate that Antichrist will win followers with gifts, *dona* and *muneribus*.[61] However, the subject of the passage is Antichrist, not Messiah. The signified reads back into the signifier and is therefore good allegory, but the signifier is taken completely out of context.

Antichrist is able to manipulate Scripture in this way because the Jews are represented as incompetent, literalist readers with no sense of the spiritual. Not only are they unaware that the texts he cites are not messianic, they do not realize that those prophecies concerning a future saviour to which he does appeal are simply no longer valid. In like manner, they do not understand that Mosaic law, in the form of paschal and other sacrifice, has been fulfilled and negated in Christian sacrament. Early on in the play, all four Jewish Kings invite Antichrist, who has encouraged them in their adherence to the old law, to "keep" their sacrifice with them:

> Forsoothe, in seate thou shalt be sett
> and honored with lambe and geat [goat]

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[60] "Dabit eis potestatem, et multis terram dividet gratuito" (Vulgate).

[61] In the *Legenda Aurea*, the same Old Testament text is cited in "De Adventu Domini" and is glossed: "Antichrist will give many gifts to those who have been deceived" ("Antichristus deceptis dona multa dabit," Lumiansky and Mills 2: 334, 56n.). Adso writes:

> He [Antichrist] will set against the faithful in three ways, that is, by means of terror, rewards, and miracles. He will give copious amounts of gold and silver to those who believe in him, for at that time all his hidden treasures will be revealed. Those whom he is unable to corrupt with rewards he will conquer with terror; those whom he is not able to vanquish with terror, he will attempt to seduce with signs.
> [Eriget itaque se contra fideles tribus modis, id est, terrore, muneribus et miraculis. Dabit credentibus in se auri atque argenti copias tempore enim ejus omnes absconditi thesauri revelabuntur. Quos autem muneribus corrumpere non poterit, terrore superabit; quos autem terrore non poterit vincere, signis et miraculis seducere tentabit.] (*PL* 101: 1294)

> as Moyses lawe that lasteth yett.
> as hee hath sayde before. (173-76)

By the end of the play, however, the Jews come to realize the error of their ways as the power of Christian law and sacrament over Jewish law and sacrifice is effectively demonstrated by Enoch and Elijah against Antichrist. These two prophets (along with the Jewish Kings they have very nearly converted) make it a condition of their faith in Antichrist that the dead men whom he has resurrected eat and drink in their presence to prove they have risen bodily and are not just spirits or demons (547-52). Antichrist agrees to the test and calls his resurrected servants forward, unaware of (even deceived as to) the type of food his minions will be required to consume. Elijah produces two pieces of bread which, before giving them over to the dead men, he blesses "that the fyend, mankyndes foe, / on hit have no power" (567-68):

> This bread I blesse with my hand
> in Jesus name, I understand,
> the which ys lord of sea and land
> and kinge of heaven on hie.
> In nomine Patris -- that all hath wrought --
> et Filii virginis -- that deare us bought --
> et Spiritus Sancti -- ys all my thought --
> on God and persons three. (569-76)

Although Elijah does not speak the words of consecration, the pieces of bread he offers visually approximate sacred Hosts -- *Primus Mortuis*, demanding that the bread be removed from his sight, complains, "That prynt that ys uppon hit pight [placed], / hit puttes me to great feere" (579-80). Hosts were regularly inscribed with "a cross, the letters IHS, and from the twelfth century, a crucifixion scene or the lamb of God" (Rubin, *Corpus Christi* 39). This is likely the "prynt" to which the dead man objects.

Therefore the final battle between Antichrist and Enoch and Elijah comes down to a battle between the ruin of the Old Testament and law, which Antichrist attempts to allegorize to his own advantage, and the New Testament and law, which Enoch and Elijah demonstrate to be the true fulfillment and ultimate downfall of the old. Projecting himself into the past, Antichrist assumes the identity of the Messiah by inserting himself into types and figures made vacant by the advent of Jesus Christ. For this reason, the Jew should remain wary of the word and the law long after the Incarnation and Passion have come and gone. Both God and the Devil remain willing and able to manipulate signs to their own ends; language must therefore be considered inherently deceptive by both believers and unbelievers who feel themselves susceptible to its seductive charm.

As Artaud warns the poets and patrons of his theatre of cruelty, "it is our veneration for what has already been created, however beautiful and valid it may be, that petrifies us, deadens our responses . . ." (*TD* 78; see n. 1), and allows the evil demiurge -- either Christ or Antichrist -- to turn his trick. Yet, strategies of resistance are open to the exceptional reader or writer. He or she, Artaud promises, can still make contact with the actual poetry -- that underlying power, thought-energy, life force, determinism of change, lunar menses -- which lies beneath the fixed text, and is itself without form and without text.

Chapter 3

Strategies of Resistance: Humankind versus God

1. Artaud: Spirit, Body, and the Word

Artaud acknowledges that human beings in general do not wish to recognize and want still less to be confronted with the possibility that language, convention, and law are unstable and even illusory. They take comfort in forms, which in itself is not harmful; the real problem arises when this comfort takes precedence over everything else and blocks out all manifestations of the anarchy underlying form.

Ironically, according to Artaud, humankind is not alone in its addiction to certainty and security and so to stasis and rest. God the Father too, although capable of direct intervention in the affairs of his subjects, prefers to stand back, to watch from a distance, and to leave the word to exert authority over men and women in his name. As Artaud writes in "Letter against the Kabbala," "God does not exist, he withdraws, gets the fuck on out and leaves the cops to keep an eye on things" (trans. Rattray 114).[1] In more gracious terms, God prefers to remain transcendent, "'wholly other' to the universe," an unmoved mover, pure actuality without any potential for change (Angeles 111). His reluctance to manifest himself, Artaud claims, is the result of a combination of laziness and squeamishness. The "Ancient of Days" initially withdrew from the world, "not in order to make room for it," but because he considered it "a reject, a foul-smelling turd" which "he just didn't want to risk touching . . . with a ten-foot pole"(trans. Rattray, "Letter against the Kabbala" 115).[2] He left the word and the law behind, however, in the hope that his creation (or, excretion) might somehow be shaped and purified, and in this way someday become worthy of him:

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[1] "Dieu n'est pas, il se retire, et fout le camp, et laisse des sbires" (*Lettre contre la Cabbale* 12).

[2] "Le monde a été laissé aux hommes non comme une création mais comme un rejet, une crotte infâme dont zimzoum l'ancien des jours faisant zimzoum s'est retiré, non pour lui faire place mais pour ne pas risquer d'en être même frôlé" (*Lettre contre la Cabbale* 15).

> Like Jesus Christ there is supposed also to be one who never would descend to earth, because man was too small for him; and so he stayed in the abysses of infinities, like some so-called immanence of God who indefatigably and like some Buddha in his self-contemplation awaits the day that BEING will be sufficiently perfect for Him to descend into and slip inside it, which is the infamous scheming of a slothful and cowardly rotter who would never have wanted to suffer . . . Being . . . . ("Letter to Henri Parisot," trans. Rattray 82-83)[3]

God's institution of the word and of the law is therefore more than a simple act of cowardice allowing him to create "things while abandoning them, so as to withdraw into the center of himself, in order to make room for them and let them take care of themselves . . ." ("Letter against the Kabbala," trans. Rattray 113).[4] As discussed earlier, the law is the means by which God dissociates himself from the physicality of the world, exalting and privileging himself as spirit, but it is also an instrument by means of which the flesh may be refined, through human labour, into a state God would eventually be willing to inhabit. Humankind is under the mistaken impression that it suffers for its own purification, Artaud warns, and so pathetically struggles on. Watching from a great distance, God, pure spirit, does nothing to correct this misconception.

The dichotomy of flesh and spirit insinuated into the human body forces men and women to acknowledge and participate in their own debasement, and in this way encourages them to persevere in the task of purifying the body as the site of God's future manifestation. As Artaud writes in his poem "Workman's Hand & Monkey Hand," humankind is therefore at once the helpless victim of God's crime and its willing perpetrator:

god
you filthy old monkey
where did yr hand plunge into the mildewed

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[3] Comme Jésus-christ il y aurait aussi celui qui n'est jamais descendu sur terre parce que l'homme était trop petit pour lui et qui est demeuré dans les abîmes des infinis, comme une soi-disant immanence de dieu qui sans fatigue, et tel un boudha de sa propre contemplation, attendrait que l'ÊTRE soit assez parfait pour y descendre et s'y installer, ce qui est l'infâme calcul d'un lâche et d'un paresseux qui n'aurait pas voulu souffrir l'être . . . . ("Lettre à Henri Parisot, Rodez, 7 septembre 1945," *OC* 9: 64)

[4] "fait les choses en les quittant pour se retirer au milieu de lui-même, afin de leur laisser la place et de les laisser se démerder . . ." (*Lettre contre la Cabbale* 11).

pus of that being who
was fucked by the crime you committed
when he tried to resemble you
god? (trans. Rattray 212)[5]

With the spirit's encouragement, "Man" as workman tries to emulate God, wears "hipboots to climb clear of this / shit from cesspool anus to the roof" (212)[6] in the hope of breaking through to the other side of the dichotomy, to the realm of spirit. However, the ceiling is the limit, as God very well knows. When Man reaches this barrier, he will "sweat then, / sweat some more, writhing / in all that clay you [God] thought you created him out of" (212) but from which in fact Man made himself after the specifications provided in the law and grounded in the division of word and meaning:

(you did force him, when you thought you'd force him to be born again
to be born again in yr plagiary of innate essence
yr Being innate by presupposition at the bottom of yr
innateness supposedly above all creatures . . . . (212)[7]

It was man's hard labour that made him human (213)[8] -- the labour was not, as so often claimed, God the monkey's. He merely watched from a distance as human beings fashioned themselves according to the flesh / spirit hierarchy and was amused as they bumped their heads trying to achieve the transcendence promised and demanded of them.

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[5] dieu, sale vieux chimpanzé,
où ta main a-t-elle plongé dans la rouille
du pus de l'être
foutu de crime
que tu as fait
quand il voulut te ressembler?
dieu . . . . ("Main d'ouvrier et main de singe," *OC* 24: 365)

[6] "Qui, du cul de la basse fosse monte / ses bottes d'égoutier / jusqu'au toit" (*OC* 24: 364).

[7] en tordant suée
sur suée
tout le limon dont tu crus le faire naître,
dont tu l'as fait en croyant le faire renaître,
renaître de ton innéité volée,
de toi inné présupposé,
du fond du toi inné supposé ôté de tout . . . . (*OC* 24: 364)

[8] "c'est son travail qui l'a fait homme" (*OC* 24: 365).

Humankind's complicity in the face of their own debasement means that men and women are as responsible for their misconceptions and thus misdirected labours as is God the Father. However, the necessity of their active participation in God's plan for creation, in addition to allotting human beings their fair share of blame and guilt, suggests to Artaud that effective strategies for combatting God's plan may be open to human agents. The source of humanity's shame thus becomes the source of all its hope. Just as revolution provides the opportunity for repression, repression encourages revolution, especially when men and women realize that their subjection is to a large degree the result of their own spiritless (or in this case, "spirit-full") acquiescence to the designs of an arrogant and slothful god.

2. Strategy 1: Anarchic Poetry

In the same essay in which he describes all signification as arbitrary, Artaud maintains that truly effective poetry must be anarchic. "[P]oetry is anarchic to the degree that it brings into play all the relationships of object to object and of form to signification," he writes; "It is anarchic also to the degree that its occurrence is the consequence of a disorder that draws us closer to chaos" ("Metaphysics and the Mise en Scène," *TD* 43).[9] Poetic anarchy, epitomized in the unexpected inversions of a Marx Brothers' film, at the very least participates in and so exposes the disorder fundamental to language. The Occidental myth that conventional words signify unproblematically and thus somehow relate to reality, is shattered by the simple, literal inversion of a woman suddenly falling backwards onto a divan, exposing, "for an instant, all we could wish to see" (*TD* 143).[10]

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[9] "la poésie est anarchique dans la mesure où elle remet en cause toutes les relations d'objet à object et des formes avec leurs significations. Elle est anarchique aussi dans la mesure où son apparition est la conséquence d'un désordre qui nous rapproche du chaos" (64).

True reality, unlike the façade of language and "civilization," is reasonless and chaotic, and those who recognize and participate in this reality think nothing of patting a woman on the behind "in time to the music" (*TD* 143),[11] of running around in a dirty cow barn "pawing the naked shoulders of their master's daughter, the equals at last of their hysterical master" (144).[12] To some small degree, anarchic poetry makes a return to a time before language by celebrating language's current insubstantiality or unreality, simultaneously revealing and recreating "an anarchistic state in which the true being of man and of universal forces can be seen without distortion by logical and abstract language" (Greene, *Thought* 199). According to Artaud, a Marx Brothers' film is therefore a particular instance of plague, in which words, laws, and conventions dissolve, not because they are worked upon or battered down by some outside force, but because they were never really "real" to begin with.

Initially, the Marx Brothers' "meanings" and methodologies appear identical to those of the Surrealist poets, as Artaud himself points out in his discussion of the film *Animal Crackers*:

> The first film of the Marx Brothers that we have seen here, *Animal Crackers*, appeared to me and to everyone as an *extraordinary thing*: the liberation through the medium of the screen of a particular magic which the customary relation of words and images does not ordinarily reveal, and if there is a definite characteristic, a distinct poetic state of mind that can be called *surrealism*, *Animal Crackers* participated in that state altogether. (*TD* 142)[13]

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[10] "une femme se renverse tout à coup, les jambes en l'air, sur un divan, et montre, l'espace d'un instant, tout ce que nous aurions voulu voir . . ." (215).

[11] "qu'un homme se jette brusquement dans un salon sur une femme, fasse avec elle quelques pas de danse et la fesse ensuite en cadence, il y a là comme l'exercice d'une sorte de liberté intellectuelle . . ." (215).

[12] "deux valets ravisseurs triturent comme il leur plaît les épaules nues de la fille de leur maître, et traitent d'égal à égal avec le maître désemparé" (216).

[13] Le premier film des Marx Brothers que nous ayons vu ici: *Animal Crackers*, m'est apparu, et il a été regardé par tout le monde comme une *chose extraordinaire*, comme la libération par le moyen de l'écran d'une magie particulière que les rapports coutumiers

Unexpected actions and inversions in this film "comprise a kind of exercise of intellectual freedom in which the unconscious of each of the characters, repressed by conventions and habits, avenges itself and us at the same time" (143).[14] However, Artaud writes, in the Marx Brothers' later film *Monkey Business*, these same inversions become more than just poetic expressions, even manifestations, of language's inherent disorder. They begin to suggest that man's enslavement to form is a crime of his own doing and that this crime is committed in the service of a chaotic force underlying language, lying in wait behind its apparently secure form. As a result, for Artaud at least, "the spiritual claim" of this later film "seems double" (143).[15]

Artaud suggests that there is something in *Monkey Business* that goes beyond Surrealism, beyond the liberation of the subconscious, and even beyond the idea of humour as conventionally understood. There is a dark side to the film that seems to arise from its strange coupling of insanity and "nostalgia." Artaud points to a scene in which a hunted man and a beautiful woman dance together "poetically" (143):

> the fact that the music to which the couple dances . . . may be a music of nostalgia and escape, *a music of deliverance*, sufficiently indicates the dangerous aspect of all these funny jokes; and when the poetic spirit is exercised, it always leads toward a kind of boiling anarchy, an essential disintegration of the real by poetry. (144)[16]

> des mots et des images ne révèlent d'habitude pas, et s'il est un état caractérisé, un degré poétique distinct de l'esprit qui se puisse appeler *surréalisme*, *Animal Crackers* y participait entièrement. (213)

[14] "il y a là comme l'exercice d'une sorte de liberté intellectuelle où l'inconscient de chacun des personnages, comprimé par les conventions et les usages, se venge, et venge le nôtre en même temps . . ." (215).

[15] "la revendication spirituelle apparait double" (215).

[16] Mais que la musique sur laquelle danse le couple . . . soit une musique de nostalgie et d'évasion, *une musique de déliverance*, indique assez le côté dangereux de toutes ces blagues humoristiques, et que l'esprit poétique quand il s'exerce tend toujours à une espèce d'anarchie bouillante, à une désagréation intégrale du réel par la poésie. (216)

Artaud does not go on to explain what he means by this "real" that may be disintegrated, but because it may be destroyed by anarchic poetry, it is likely the illusory reality constructed by the Occident and its word, and this in fact seems the object of the couple's nostalgia. Longing for the form and security of all that seemed certain in the past, they dance to a music that momentarily delivers them from the "boiling anarchy" of inversion and pursuit. However, they cannot escape the film's disruptive force forever; "the intoxication . . . of the Marx Brothers' pirouettes" (144)[17] must catch up with them eventually. Inevitable disintegration is the only certainty conveyed in a film like *Monkey Business*, and this certainty cannot be the object of nostalgia. Far from delivering the couple (or the audience) from the threat of chaos, it delivers them into its gaping jaws, and thus "projects into the mind" a "powerful anxiety" (144).[18]

In this way, Artaud's anarchic poetry reveals the myth of the word-made-flesh (the idea or divine reassurance that words and signs signify unproblematically) to be false and deceptive, and thus provides human beings a line of defence against the trickster spirit who would, above all else, have them believe in the structure and integrity of language. In Artaud's universe, the word unites and conquers, first by insinuating the spirit into individual bodies, then by joining these bodies under ideologies, class structures, and allegiances which offer placating but illusory social and material freedoms.[19] In order to do away with God, each human being must individually reject language down to its very components "of a.b.c. of arithmetic and alphabet" ("Letter against the Kabbala," trans. Rattray 115).[20] This rejection and its resultant chaos will not only reveal an "aberrance already in the world" and within the human unconscious (as Surrealism's transformational poetry supposedly does), but, further, will "overthrow . . . everything *including* the already present dissonances, aberrances, or elements of the unconscious in the world" (Schehr 113).

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[17] "l'ébriété . . . des pirouettes des Marx Brothers" (216).

[18] "finit par projeter dans l'esprit . . . [une] inquiétude puissante" (217).

[19] Artaud's break with the Surrealist movement was provoked by Breton and his school's temporary association with the French Communist Party. In his 1927 article "In Total Darkness, or The Surrealist Bluff" ("A la grande Nuit ou le Bluff surréaliste"), Artaud maintains that any involvement in or concern with social "Revolution" distracts the individual from the more authentic task of personal revolution: "For each man to refuse to consider anything beyond his own deepest sensibility, beyond his inmost self, this for me is the point of view of the complete Revolution" (trans. Weaver 140n; "Que chaque homme ne veuille rien considérer au delà de sa sensibilité profonde, de son moi intime, voilà pour moi le point de vue de la Révolution intégrale," *OC* 1: 284n). As far as Artaud is concerned, the Surrealists' interest in things material and social marks the beginning of the end of their movement. He accuses his opponents of becoming "revolutionaries who revolutionize nothing" (142; "révolutionnaires qui ne

According to Artaud, anarchic poetry can take any number of forms. Emptied of signification, the word may be made use of "in a concrete and spatial sense, [combined] . . . with everything in the theater that is spatial and significant in the concrete domain" (*TD* 72); it will thus be

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révolutionnent rien," *OC* 1: 287), cowards who have caved into the demand that they "depend on things and on their transformations for guidance" (142; "S'en remettre aux choses, à leurs transformations, du soin de nous conduire," *OC* 1: 287). He writes:

> Within the narrow framework of our tangible domain we are pressured and solicited from every direction. We have seen this clearly in that aberration which has led revolutionaries on the highest possible level [the Surrealists] to literally abandon this level and to attach to this word 'revolution' its utilitarian and practical meaning, the social meaning that is alleged to be the only valid one, since no one wants to be taken in by words. Curious reversal of position, curious leveling process. (143-44)
>
> [Dans le cadre exigu de notre domaine palpable nous sommes pressés, sollicités de toute part. On l'a bien vu dans cette aberration qui a conduit des révolutionnaires sur le plan le plus haut possible, à abondonner littéralement ce plan, à attacher à ce mot de révolution son sens utilitaire pratique, le sens social dont on prétend qu'il est seul valable, car on ne veut pas se payer de mots. Etrange retour sur soi-même, étrange nivellement.] (*OC* 1: 289).

Artaud adamantly refuses to follow the Surrealists in their example:

> my well-known mental debility and cowardice refuse to take the slightest interest in upheavals which would affect only this external, immediately perceptible aspect of reality. External metamorphosis is, in my opinion, something which can only be given as a bonus. The social level, the material level toward which the Surrealists direct their pathetic attempts at action, their forever ineffectual hatreds, is for me no more than a useless and obvious illusion. (144-45)
>
> [Mais ma débilité mentale, ma lâcheté bien connues se refusent à trouver le moindre intérêt à des bouleversements qui n'affecteraient que ce côté extérieur, immédiatement perceptible, de la réalité. La métamorphose extérieure est une chose à mon sens qui ne peut être donnée que par surcroît. Le plan social, le plan matériel vers lequel les surréalistes dirigent leurs pauvres velléités d'action, leurs haines à tout jamais virtuelles n'est pour moi qu'une représentation inutile et sous-entendue.] (*OC* 1: 290).

[20] "d'abécédaire, d'arithmétique et d'alphabet" (*Lettre contre la Cabbale* 4).

manipulated "like a solid object, one which overturns and disturbs things" (72) and which belongs to the realm "of formal anarchy on the one hand but also . . . of continuous formal creation on the other" (72).[21] Conventional signifiers may be used to signify unconventionally (as in the Marx Brothers' unexpected inversions) or, to equal effect, unconventional signifiers may be used as though to signify conventionally or unproblematically. Artaud often breaks his poems with extended lines of nonsensical writing or sound:

> o dedi
> a dada orzoura
> o dou zoura
> a dada skizi
>
> o kaya
> o kaya pontoura
> o ponoura
> a pena
> poni. ("Le Retour d'Artaud, le Mômo" *OC* 12: 13)

It is never Artaud's intention that the words he writes or speaks should not be understood -- or at least, that they should not be understood by his fellow humans. In the case of his "glossolalia" or "vocal xylophonics," he is attempting to formulate "words that have never been written or spoken before" and therefore to produce a language without repetition and thus without dead and deadening expectation or convention (Stout 118). Because words within this language will only be spoken once, they cannot communicate in the conventional way, that is, via human reason or spirit; instead, they must convey thoughts, feelings directly to the body by affecting men and women on a physical level (Greene *Thought* 220). Anarchic poetry can therefore transmit information despite the fact that it bypasses the intellect. Originating or embedding itself in the flesh, it resonates and signifies there:

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[21] changer la destination de la parole au théâtre c'est s'en servir dans un sens concret et spatial, et pour autant qu'elle se combine avec tout ce que le théâtre contient de spatial et de significations dans le domaine concret; c'est la manipuler comme un objet solide et qui ébranle des choses . . . dans un domaine . . . de l'anarchie formelle d'une part mais aussi de la création formelle continue d'autre part. (111-12).

> *All true language*
> *is incomprehensible,*
> *like the chatter*
> *of a beggar's teeth;*
> *or the clap (whorehouse)*
> *of a toothy femur (bloody).* ("Here Lies," trans. Weaver 549)[22]

According to Gilles Deleuze, the anarchic, or to use his term, "schizophrenic," utterance consists of either "passion" or "action" words which, in their turn, either wound the speaker's flesh or blaze forth from it, either fragment his or her body or transform it into one without organs. In the first case,

> Words cease to express attributes of the state of things. Their fragments mix with unbearable sonorous qualities and break into parts of the body where they form a mixture, a new state of things, as if they themselves were noisy, poisonous foods and encased excrements. The organs of the body become defined and determined as a function of the decomposed elements which affect and attack them. ("The Schizophrenic and Language" 287)

In response to this painful fragmentation,

> the schizophrenic fights and strives to affirm the rights of another sort of word over the passion-word. It is henceforth less a matter for the schizophrenic of recuperating meaning than of destroying words, of warding off affects, or of transforming the body's painful passion into a triumphant action . . . . Just as . . . the power of wounding was in the phonetic elements affecting the encased or dislocated parts of the body, so victory now can be obtained only by establishing breath-words, scream-words in which all values are exclusively tonic and nonwritten. To these values corresponds a superior body . . . without parts, one that functions entirely by insufflation, inhaling, evaporation, and transmission of fluids. (288)

In either case, "words develop in relation to the state of the body" (291). As a result, Deleuze writes, "everything happens below meaning, far from the surface" (291).

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[22] *Tout vrai langage*
est incompréhensible,
comme la claque
du claque dents;
ou le claque (bordel)
du fémur à dents (en sang). ("Ci-gît," *OC* 12: 95)

Of necessity, such utterances will be inaccessible and incomprehensible to God, who is without flesh by choice. God the Father cannot possibly understand the at first deceptively hesitant answer Artaud gives to his own question, "What is the body?":

> It's this
> a-um
> this ah-na
> this ha mah
> this ah-mah
> which isn't mä
> but lä-h --
> which isn't ah ou [sic] ha
> but SL. ("Here Where I Stand," trans. Hirschman 202-03)[23]

Artaud demonstrates that human beings are not the only ones who may be excluded and debased by the spirit / flesh dichotomy established by God. Dichotomies necessitate hierarchies -- there is no such thing as "equal but different" in Artaud's universe -- but hierarchies can be inversed. Because everything is anarchic and arbitrary, attitude determines everything. Thus the physical word and the body can and should be privileged over meaning and the spirit in an exclusive, fleshly language of humankind's own making, and this to God the Father and his Son's shame and debasement.

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[23] C'est cet
a - um
cet ah - na
cet a ha
cet ha mah
cet ah - mah
qui n'est pas *mä*
mais lä - h -
qui n'est pas ah ou ha
mais TA- . . . . ("La où j'en suis" 133)

2.a. Rejecting *Logos*: Pharaoh, Herod, and the Slaughter of the Innocents

Some of the implications of the "carnal" biblical exegete's reliance on words have already been discussed. Caught in a trap of his own making, the poor or unwary reader -- most often the Jew -- holds to empty signifiers and their supposed significations in the face of the semiotic chaos and upheaval which is God the Spirit's prerogative. However, according to Christian authorities, another, more sinister side of this imperfect reader remains to be explored -- that side or part of the perverse exegete that acknowledges the "truth" of Christ yet rejects it in a futile attempt to revolt against God or *Logos*. In this case, guilt is not assigned to the reader retroactively but proactively; his heart may be hardened, but his intellect is not necessarily (or at least, in all cases) congenitally impaired. While it is true that the perverse villain may appear to be rather slow or even mad, his simple-mindedness and / or insanity does not prevent him from recognizing divinely sanctioned truths. Rather, his mental dullness or instability seems a consequence of his rejection of divine *Logos* (which is the ultimate guarantor of signification and order), and is perhaps even an anarchic method or strategy for dealing with that *Logos* in its incarnate form.

Pharaoh, pagan king of Egypt, stands as an obvious figure or type of the Passion and post-Passion Jew in two nearly identical plays from the York and Towneley manuscripts.[24] At the beginning of both plays, Pharaoh's councillors inform him of various "truths" about their captives, the Israelites -- specifically, they tell him how quickly the Jews multiply and how, in secret, they speak of a messiah or saviour who is to deliver them from captivity:

> Thay were talde but sexty and ten
>   Whan þei enterd into þis lande.
> Sithen haue they soionerd here in Jessen
>   Foure houndereth ȝere, þis we warande,
> Now are they noumbered of myghty men

---

[24] For a discussion of the relationship between York and Towneley, see Lyle, *The Original Identities of the York and Towneley Cycles*. For a short discussion of the relationship between the Egyptian and Jew in medieval Christian exegesis, see Lubac 1: 144.

Wele more þan thre hundereth thowsande

. . . .

Lorde, we have herde oure fadres telle
Howe clerkis, þat ful wele couthe rede,
Saide a man shulde wax þam emell
That suld fordo vs and owre dede. (York 11.51-56, 63-66; Towneley 8.55-60, 67-70)

Pharaoh realizes the danger inherent in these "truths" or "facts," both present and future. "So myght we be bygillid," he admits -- yet immediately resolves, "Bot certis þat sall noght be" (York 59, 60; Towneley 63, 64). "Swilke destanye sall we noght drede" he vows (York 68, Towneley 72), promising his councillors, "with qwantise we sall þam [the Jews] qwelle / Þat þei sall no farrar sprede"" (York 61-62, Towneley 65-66). He determines to effect no less a task than the complete revision of history or of the "destanye" he refuses to fear, and decides to effect that revision using two different, but equally devious, strategies:

We sall make mydwayes to spille þam,
Whenne oure Ebrewes are borne,
All þat are mankynde to kille þam,
So sall they sone by lorne.

For of the other haue I non awe.
Swilke bondage sall we to þam bede:
To dyke [dig] and delfe [labour], beere and drawe,
And do all swilke vnhonest dede.
Þus sall þe laddis beholden [adhere to] lawe,
Als losellis ever thaire lyff to leede. (York 69-78, Towneley 73-82)

This projected revision of divine history and typological rejection of the Incarnation of Christ the Word enables Pharaoh's later and parallel rejection of "truth" and his perversion of speech. Pharaoh repeatedly lies to the Israelites, offering them safe passage out of Egypt while secretly plotting their ambush and murder.[25] He tells his messenger:

Go saie we sal no lenger greve --
But þai sall neuere þe tytar gang

---

[25] Compare this to the biblical account where Pharaoh is never directly accused of lying to or deceiving the Israelites (see Exod. 6-14). Pharaoh's heart is repeatedly hardened and he frequently changes his mind, but he apparently never sets out to trick Moses and the Jews -- he is thus inconstant, but not dishonest.

. . . .
Go saie we giffe þam leue to goo
  To tyme there parellis be ouer-past --
But or thay flitte over-farre vs froo
  We sall garre fest þam foure [four times] so fast
. . . .
Go saie we graunte þam leue to gange
  In the devill way, sen itt bus be done --
For so may fall we sall þam fange [catch]
  And marre þam or tomorne at none. (York 279-80, 305-08, 353-56; Towneley 291-92, 316-19, 362-65)

By rejecting prophecy, divine history, and therefore truth and the Word itself, Pharaoh makes possible the lie, the conscious and purposeful rejection of any divinely sanctioned correlation between signifier and signified. Of course, the lie is ultimately ineffective because Moses has a personal and direct relationship with God or *Logos* and therefore with that force that guarantees signification. Thus Moses is at all times aware that Pharaoh has intentionally separated his thought from its expression: "I wate ful wele þer wordes er wrange," he tells the king's messenger; "That sall ful sone be sene" (York 284-85; Towneley 296, 298).

As mentioned above, Pharaoh stands as a type of all Jews at the time of the Incarnation and Passion; however, for obvious reasons (the killing of Jewish male babies, for one) his closest counterpart later in the drama will be King Herod. Like Pharaoh, Herod is fully conscious of prophetic truth, having been made aware of it not only through the message of the magi, but through the words of Scripture (see Chester 8.269-349; Towneley 16.291-323) and through the whisperings of popular Jewish legend or rumour:

Bot romoure is rasyd so,
That boldly thay brade
Emangys thame:
Thay carp of a kyng,
Thay seasse not sich chateryng. (Towneley 16.111-15)

There is even in Towneley the suggestion that Herod has been privy to a divine revelation of sorts. He tells his councillors:

Oone spake in myne eere
A wonderfull talkyng.

And sayde a madyn shuld bere
Anothere to be kyng. (16.287-90)

Herod is not ignorant of messianic prophecy, but his response to that prophecy constitutes a conscious, perverse rejection of God -- as is effectively demonstrated in N-Town when Herod offers to make a deal with the devil in order to trick the magi:

My goddys I xall vp reyse!
  A derke devyll with falsnese, I saye,
  Shall cast a myst in þe kynggys eye;
  Be bankys and be dalys drey,
Þat be derk þei xall cum this weyys. (18.225-29)

By rejecting God, Herod frees himself to reject both the signifier -- God's word -- and the signified -- Christ as Messiah -- along with the entire rule or system of divine semantics. He therefore orders his advisors, "Fy, dottypols, with youre bookys -- Go kast thaym in the brookys!" (Towneley 16.335-36; see also Chester 8.351), and determines that Christ, the spirit or subject of these condemned writings, must be sought out and killed.

Herod's rejection of divine *Logos* and hence destruction of both sign and referent is to be justified and sustained by the sheer power of his will -- and, more importantly, by the power of his sword. Herod pits his physical and political might against God's, and brashly decides that his own strength will be the greater. On the subject of the magi and the child Messiah, he vows:

By cockes sowle, come they agayne
all three traytors shall be slayne,
and that ylke swedlinge swayne --
I shall choppe of his head.
Godes grace shall them not gayne,
nor noe prophecye save them from payne. (Chester 8.398-403)

Herod then attempts to force this rejection (and intended replacement) of God's grace and providence on his subjects, again using the threat of horrendous physical violence. In Towneley, he warns the spectators (already associated with or identified as the Jews who anticipate Christ's arrival):

Stynt, brodels, youre dyn --
Yei, euerychon!

I red that ye harkyn
To I be gone;
For if I begyn,
I breke ilka bone,
And pull fro the skyn
The carcas anone
. . . .
Who that is so bold,
I brane hym thrugh the hede!
. . . .
Styr not bot ye haue lefe,
For if ye do, I clefe
You small as flesh to pott. (16.118-25, 135-36, 141-43)

And yet, despite his strong personal philosophy that "might is right," when Herod resolves to kill all male children under two years of age, he is forced to acknowledge that such an action may and will be considered immoral if judged according to divine semantics and / or religious convention. As he informs the audience in Chester:

that boye, by God almight,
shall be slayne soone in your sight,
and -- though it be agaynst the right --
a thousand for his sake. (10.21-24)

The sheer number of children slain will ensure Herod's and his soldiers' eternal damnation, but not even this fearful thought discourages them from acting. King Herod decrees: "though we therfore should goe to hell, / all the children of Israell / wee deeme them to be slayne" (Chester 10.122-24); he then orders his soldiers: "have done belyve; goe wreake my teene. / Goe slaye that shrewe" (138-39).

Ironically, even after the mention of hell, the Chester soldiers are more concerned with the social implications of their actions than the eschatological. They complain to Herod that a task of this nature would be better suited to young boys or ruffians -- not to knights of their calibre:

Alas, lord and kinge of blys,
send you after us for this?
A villanye yt weare, iwys,
for my fellowe and mee
to sley a shitten-arsed shrowe;
a ladd his head mighte of hewe.
For rybbottes [rascals] are not in this rowe.

but knightes of great degree
. . . .
for to kyll such a conjoyne [scoundrel]
mee shames sore, by saynct Mahound,
to goe in any place. (153-60, 166-68)

Herod responds to this objection by redefining the term or concept of valour -- which he of course can do because he rejects the Word incarnate. He manages to convince the soldiers that the quality of their victims, their young age and helpless condition, will be more than made up for by their quantity:

Nay, nay, it is neyther on nor two
that you shall sley, as mott I goo,
but a thousand and yett moo;
takes this in your mynd. (Chester 10.169-72)

This placates the rather easily satisfied soldiers, who now begin to boast of the very task they earlier disdained. "These congeons in there clowtes I will kill / and stowtly with strokes them destroye," the first soldier declares; "Shall never on skape by my will" (209-211). He offers to fight Sampson in the service of his king (245-46), while the second soldier swears he is ready to fight "the kinge of Scottes and all his hoste" (218) -- ironic statements, considering the actual opponents these "doughtye [men] of warre" (250) eventually face.

In the Digby *Killing of the Children*, similarly jarring incongruities arise because of the resignification or unconventional use of terms such as "bold," "hardy," and "manly." Here at least three levels of meaning conflict as Watkyn, Herod, and the mothers of the slaughtered children each assign values to either the projected or actual behaviour of the soldiers. Watkyn, for example, implores Herod to make him a knight, promising to fight "manly" for his cause (ll. 137, 156). However, as Watkyn himself confesses, he is so afraid of women bearing "rokkes" (distaffs; 159-60, 223-24) that he has concocted a battle plan or strategy that will enable him to avoid any conflict with angry mothers. He shares this plan with Herod:

And this I promyse you, that I shalle neuer slepe.
But euermore wayte to fynde the children alone,
And if the moder come in, vnder the benche I wille crepe.

> And lye stille ther tylle she be goon!
> Than manly I shalle come out and hir children sloon!
> And whan I haue don, I shalle renne fast away! (185-90)

Herod is, of course, disgusted. He maligns Watkyn's fear of women and rejects his peculiar notion of valiant behaviour: "What! Shalle a woman with a rokke drive the away?" Herod asks, incredulous; "Fye on the, traitour . . . . A bold man, and an hardy, I went thu haddist ben" (161, 162, 164). As far as Herod is concerned, Watkyn's fear of women evinces a shameful lack of courage which must be punished, and therefore he promises his subordinate, "if thu pley the coward, I put the owt of dought, / Of me thu shalt neyther haue fee nor aduauntage!" (197-98). However, Herod himself maintains that it is possible for a soldier to conduct himself courageously ("like a man" -- 196) as he slaughters helpless children. This equally peculiar (or unconventional) notion of courage is in turn rejected by the women, who read and refer to Herod's soldiers as "traitours of cruelle tormentrye" (297), "traitours" who "Vnto God . . . do grett offens" (301), and as "coward[s]" (309), "caytyves" (317), and "javelle[s]" or scoundrels" (345). The women present readings of Herod's and his soldiers' actions which agree with or appeal to convention and divine *Logos*, both of which are manifested in Jewish law.

In similar manner, their counterparts in Chester repeatedly threaten the soldiers with public hanging: "Theeffe, thou shall hanged be" (10.346); "Thow shall be hanged on a tree / and all thy fellowes with thee" (349-50); "You shalbe hanged, the rowte [the lot of you]" (378). In this way, they, too, demonstrate a dependence on or faith in divine convention in the face of Herod and the soldiers' rather unconventional, even anarchic, approaches to signification and to the law. The question is, of course, who is to hang these soldiers, since Herod, the interpreter and maker of law, has decided that their actions will determine (and not be governed by) legal and moral codes -- one notices, in contrast to the Passion plays and sequences, a conspicuous absence of debate before the Slaughter of the Innocents. At this early point in Christ's Advent, the individual empowered to uphold God's law on earth instead rejects and replaces it, and so Herod's will -- not

God's -- becomes synonymous with right reading and signification, as Herod himself informs the audience in Chester:

> beware of mee, all that binne wise,
> that weldes all at my will.
> Saye noe man anythinge is his
> but onlye at my devyce;
> for all this world lyes
> to spare and eke to spill. (10.3-8)

The social chaos and upheaval that results from this rejection and substitution of *Logos* manifests itself most powerfully and most immediately in the grotesquely mutilated bodies of Herod's victims. Their deaths and dismemberments, so graphically discussed and represented on stage, together serve as a disturbingly literal metaphor for the disintegration of the social *corpus* that necessarily attends Herod's rejection of the Word or *Logos*. In Chester, the soldiers pierce the young children with swords, mocking and scorning their mothers. "Dame, thy sonne, in good faye, / hee must of me learne a playe," the second soldier tells one of the women -- "hee must hopp, or I goe awaye, / upon my speare ende" (10.321-24; see also 361-64). The women in Towneley repeatedly lament that their sons have literally been cut to pieces: "Outt, alas, my childys bloode! . . . My comforth and my kyn, / My son thus al to-torne! (16.493, 499-500); "Alas, my bab, myn innocent . . . Thy body is all to-rent!" (560, 564). In N-Town, descriptions of the murdered children are particularly disturbing and graphic, conjuring images (which were likely dramatically represented) of decapitation, of fragmentation, and further, of the desecration of the dead. *Prima Femina* cries:

> Alas! Qwhy was my baron born?
> With swappynge swerde now is he shorn,
>   Þe heed ryght fro þe nekke!
> Shanke and shulderyn is al to-torn! (20.90-93)

When the soldiers return and inform Herod that their task has been completed, they evoke for him the bloody scene:

> Barnis ben blad
>   And lyne in dych!

Flesche and veyn
Han tholyd [suffered] peyn. (115-18)

The first soldier even bears a dead child on the end of his spear, offering it to Herod as physical evidence that their orders have been fulfilled:

Upon my spere
A gerle I bere,
I dare well swere.
Lett moderys howte! (109-12)

In response, Herod tells the soldiers that he is very pleased with their work. "[M]ore myrth nyvyr I had," he informs them (209), explaining: "Amongys all þat grett rowthte, / He [Christ] is ded, I haue no dowte" (229-30). "Þerfore, menstrell, rownd abowte," he commands, "Blowe up a mery fytt!" (231-32).

Herod's victory celebration is, of course, premature -- and not only because the object of his search is safe in Egypt. As head of state, Herod is vulnerable to the same disintegration that he himself has introduced into the social *corpus*, since anarchy and chaos are difficult to contain. It is therefore at once the height of Old Testament justice (an eye for an eye) and the mundanely logical that Herod's own body eventually falls apart as a result of his crime. In Chester, his dismemberment begins slowly and symbolically with the death of his young son, killed as a direct result of the order to seek out and slay the infant Christ. In addition to representing the king's physical continuation through the royal line, Herod's son visually approximates the tyrant, since both are dressed "in silke araye, / in gould and pyrrie" (10.409-10); therefore the boy's death prefigures as well as initiates his father's decline. Having declared of his son's murder, "yt is vengeance . . . that is now well seene" (399, 400), Herod notices that his own body has begun to disintegrate: "I wott I must dye soone," he complains; "My legges roten and my armes" (419, 422).[26] In N-Town, the character Death initiates and effects Herod's demise in an appropriately gruesome -- abject, plague-like -- way, informing the audience, "All þe blood of his body I xal hym owt swete" (20.200). Death then reminds the spectators that Herod's corpse will, after burial, be ripped and eaten by worms (256),[27] while his soul "in helle ful peynfully / Of develis is al to-torn" (257-58). This seems an appropriate punishment for a man who has ordered the brutal deaths and dismemberments of thousands of helpless children, and an appropriate end to a period of unbearable social chaos. Anarchy finally and effectively answers anarchy.

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[26] The nature of Herod's illness is described in the *Legenda Aurea*: "however, when Herod was seventy, he fell into a grave sickness, that is, he was tortured with a high fever, an itching of the body, continual torments, a swollen foot, worms in the testicles, an intolerable stench, rapid

2.b. Rejecting *Logos*: Herod, the word, and the Word at Christ's Passion

Because the dramatic representations of the Slaughter of the Innocents and its aftermath discussed above are so bloody and disturbing, it is perhaps difficult to conceive that the full consequence of Herod's and the Jews' rejection of *Logos* has yet to be experienced in the cycle or play collection. However, just as Pharaoh provides a crude type of Herod at the Incarnation, the latter character in turn serves as a carnal figure or type of his successor at Christ's Passion. During the Slaughter, blood flows from every direction; anarchy and violence manifest themselves in and through the body as the law and the word are temporarily thrust aside. In contrast, during Christ's later trial before Herod, not a drop of blood is shed. Anarchy and violence instead manifest themselves in and through language -- a more threatening and disturbing type or instance of chaos. The carnal Herod may attempt to do away with signifiers and their referents, may attempt to resignify language and change divine history, and may even (and most threateningly) attack the

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panting, and the obstruction of his breath" ("Ipse autem Herodes cum jam annos lxx haberet, in gravissimam aegritudinem cecidit, nam febre valida, prurigine corporis, continuis tormentis, pedum inflammatione, vermescentibus testiculis, intolerabili foetore, crebro anhelitu et interruptis suspiriis torquebatur," qtd. in Lumiansky and Mills 2: 156, 417-33n).

[27] Death literally, graphically represents Herod's future. He tells the audience: "Thow I be nakyd and pore of array / And wurmys knawe me al abowte, / 3it loke 3e drede me nyth and day . . ." (272-74).

body, but he does not succeed in affecting either the word or the Word. It is another case entirely with the Herod of the York Passion sequence, whose rejection of *Logos*, at least for a time and in the mouths of the tyrant and his soldiers, succeeds in cutting language to the bone.

In a moment of delicious irony, Herod calls for complete silence near the beginning of Play 31 in York -- he tells his attendant: "Nowe spedely loke þat þou spie / Þat no noyse be neghand þis none" (45-46). A little earlier in the same pageant, he advises his men to speak seriously and gravely -- "It sittis vs in sadnesse to sette all oure sawes" (26); a little later, he demands that they speak with honesty and integrity -- "3a, but loke ye telle vs no tales but trewe" (78). These prescriptions are and will be, of course, completely to nought, since Herod and his advisors reject the Word and thus all possibility of sadness and truth. Their words are emptied of significance and become nothing more than sound or noise, mere tokens to be exchanged or, more ominously, objects to be hurled.

The first sign that words have become devoid of meaning in the face of Herod's rejection (or more accurately, failed recognition) of the Word is the peculiar abundance of speech about speech or words about words one notices at Christ's trial. In this type of communication, much is said while very little is actually expressed, at least to the audience -- words accumulate while signification retreats. For example, when Christ's guards first approach Herod's palace, they are confronted by two advisors, who ask them what their "message" is (61) that they might in turn convey it to the king. These two advisors then inform Herod that two soldiers have arrived with an "vncouthe [strange] tythande" (77), a "note þat is nedfull to neven [tell] . . . of new [immediately]" (82); they are, however, unaware of the content of the message: "We wotte noght þer willyng / But boodword [tidings] full blithely þei bryng" (83-84). Herod decides to receive them -- "Nowe do þan and late vs se of þere sayng" (86) -- and so his advisors prepare the soldiers for a royal audience -- "Lo sirs, ye schall carpe with þe kyng, / And telles to hym manly youre menyng" (87-88). Their conversation then progresses (or fails to progress) as follows:

Rex What wolde you?
II Miles A worde, lorde, and youre willes were.
Rex Well, saye on þan.
I Miles My lorde, we fare foolys to flay
þat to you wolde forfette [offend].
Rex We, faire falle you þerfore.
I Miles My lorde, fro ɜe here what we saie
Itt will heffe vppe youre hertis.
Rex 3a, but saie what heynde [person] haue ɜe þore?
II Miles A presente fro Pilate, lorde, þe prince of oure lay.
Rex Pese in my presence, and nemys hym no more

. . . .

Gose tyte with þat gedlyng [Christ] agayne,
And saie hym [Pilate] a borowed bene sette I noght be hym. (90-96, 101-02)

The soldiers eventually persuade Herod that they would never "brynge" him "any message of mysse" (112), and so the tyrant invites them to identify ("nemyn") their captive (113). "Sir, Criste haue we called hym at hame" (114), the first soldier replies, conveying more information in this simple, direct statement than he and his fellow have done in the preceding fifty lines. Herod is delighted: not only does he recognize the name ("O, þis is the ilke selue and þe same," 115), he reads Pilate's transfer of the prisoner as an act of humble subjection. "Þanne knawes he [Pilate] þat oure myghtis are þe more?" Herod asks the soldiers (131); "3a, sertis sir," the first soldier replies, "so saie we þore" (132). "O, my harte hoppis for joie / To se nowe þis prophette appere," Herod confesses (163-64), after promising his attendants (somewhat mysteriously), "Nowe þes games was grathely begonne" (119). He repeats this strange statement not once but twice -- "We schall haue good game with þis boy" (165); "We schall haue gaudis full goode and games or we goo" (237) -- and suggests at least once that the "games" he refers to will have something to do with language, or at least with sound -- "Takis hede, for in haste ɜe schall here" (166).

What Herod hopes and intends is that Christ will amuse them with some mad, prophetic utterance or oration, and so he assures his followers, "I leve we schall laugh and haue likyng / To se nowe þis lidderon her he leggis [expounds] oure lawis" (167-68). Christ's anarchic speech is not expected to bring enlightenment or knowledge, but to provide the court with entertainment; his words are thus effectively separated from thought or meaning, are labelled mere products of "madness" and objects of laughter, before they are even spoken. However, as Herod quickly discovers, Christ has no intention of going along with the tyrant's projected game plan, and may even have an agenda of his own. By repeatedly refusing to respond to Herod's questions and demands, he forces the tyrant to go to considerable (and increasingly ridiculous) lengths to communicate. Thus Herod and his followers, not Christ, become a source of laughter, sport, or "game" in the pageant, as their questions and statements become increasingly confused, nonsensical and bizarre.

For example, Herod, over the course of Christ's interrogation, speaks at least three different languages, and in this way unwittingly illustrates or exemplifies the instability and subjectivity of human speech in relation to its object or meaning. "Saie, beene-venew in bone fay, / Ne plesew & a parle remoy?" (145)[28] Herod begins, greeting Christ using words that just barely resemble French, the language of nobility and therefore a language Herod assumes his prisoner, as "king," will understand. When Christ does not respond, Herod tries next to communicate in English, the language of the commons: "Saie firste at þe begynnyng withall, where was þou borne? / Do felawe, for thy faith, latte vs falle ynne" (186-87). Again, Christ remains silent, prompting the tyrant to exclaim with some frustration:

> I faute in my reuerant in otill moy,
>   I am of fauour, loo, fairer be ferre.
> Kyte oute yugilment. Vta! Oy! Oy!
>   Be any witte þat Y watte it will waxe werre. (239-42)[29]

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[28] "Hello, in good faith; wouldn't you like to speak with me?" is probably the sense of Herod's greeting.

[29] "Il faut me révérer, moi en haut" ("it is necessary to revere me on high") is probably the modern French equivalent of the first part of Herod's demand. His next two words are English -- to "kythe" is to make something known or to reveal something, so "Kyte oute" is likely the medieval interrogator's way of saying, "Talk, damn it!" -- but "yugilment" is neither French nor English, or is both. According to Garrett Epp, the word Herod uses may be "jugilment," deriving

If Herod's general use and interspersion of French and English demonstrates that expression is unstable and subjective, in that meaning may be communicated in many ways and by means of different words in different languages, this outburst renders language even more unstable and subjective. Herod, it seems without regard for comprehension and for effective communication, changes or exchanges competing semiotic systems in the same breath and thus produces his own nonsensical glossolalia.

However, he quickly regains his composure, and language as a result reclaims its systemic boundaries. Herod makes one last attempt to communicate, this time addressing Christ in uncorrupted Latin, the language of the clergy:

> *Si loqueris tibi laus,*
>   *Pariter quoque prospera dantur;*
> *Si loqueris tibi fraus,*
>   *Fell fex et bella parantur.* (261-64)

"If you speak well of yourself," Herod promises, "good fortune will be given to you; if you speak incorrectly or lie," he threatens, "you will gain only bitterness and strife." He then instructs his advisors to address Christ as king for one last time -- "Mi menne . . . go menske [honour] hym with mayne [in earnest]" (265) -- which they do, again in an appropriate (and increasingly difficult to understand) language -- "Dewcus fayff ser and sofferayne" (267); "Sir vdins amangidre demayne" (268). When Christ again remains silent, Herod is incensed, wonders perhaps if their prisoner is not familiar with the gentler languages, and thus demands of his advisors, "Wherto calle ye hym a kyng?" (276). They respond that there is actually no reason or justification for Christ's claim to such a title: "Nay lorde," they answer, "he is none, / But an harlotte is hee" (276-77). Herod therefore decides that they have no obligation to continue their attempts at communication -- they will instead use words independent of meaning, as objects with which to

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from the Old French "jugler" -- to entertain by jesting; to put under a spell, to deceive. See Kurath and Kuhn.

torture and torment Christ. From now on, they will regard and utilize "language as [a] blunt weapon more than as [a] tool for communication" (Epp "Imitation" 190), will manipulate the word "like a solid object, one which overturns and disturbs things" (*TD* 72; see above, 188-89). "[S]en he freyms [invents] falsed and makis foule fraye," Herod orders his sons and advisors, "Raris [roar, shout] on hym rudely, and loke ȝe not roune [mutter, whisper]" (309-10).

Earlier in the pageant, the word is (to a lesser degree) regarded as an object or possession, and, on at least one occasion, its physical nature or quality takes precedence over its meaning or signification. When Christ first refuses to speak, Herod is so astonished that he asks the soldiers, "Say, whare ledde ȝe þis lidrone? His langage is lorne" (190) -- as if to suggest that Christ has misplaced or lost his words and / or the ability to speak at some place or point between Pilate's court and their own. Herod's council in response attempts to convince their leader that Christ is silent, not because he does not understand meaning or because he is deaf or dumb, but because Herod's words, without any regard to sense, are so frightening. "My lorde," his first advisor respectfully suggests, "it astonys hym, youre steuen is so store [loud] / Hym had leuere haue stande stone still þer he stode" (251-52). Of course, this notion pleases Herod to no end: "And whedir þe boy be abasshid of Herrowde byg blure [loud voice]," he exclaims, "That were a bourde of þe beste, be Mahoundes bloode" (253-54). "My lorde," Herod's second advisor then finds the courage to add, "Y trowe youre fauchone [sword] hym flaies / And lettis hym" (255-56); *II Dux* thus implies that Herod's sword, as object, is more threatening to their captive than is his voice. This rather comically undermines Herod's pride in his "byg blure," yet effectively establishes the connection between word and thing, word and object, language and weapon. Because the two may be substituted one for the other, they are effectively rendered equal.

In response to his second advisor's comment, Herod offers to "waffe" away his sword and "softely [!] with a septoure assaie" (257, 258); not long after he determines to exchange his weapon once more, and to exploit Christ's supposed fear of the spoken (or shouted) word by allowing his subordinates to "roar" at their captive (as is mentioned above). Herod hands Christ over to his sons for interrogation and verbal torture in much the same way as Annas and Caiaphas and later Pilate hand Jesus over to their respective soldiers for buffeting and scourging (see 29.349-83; 33.336-431). At the height of their inquisition, Herod's sons hurl words at Christ with a violence equal to that used by their counterparts in other pageants who wound Christ with bare fists and knotted cords:

> *III Filius* Say somwhat -- or it will waxe werre.
> *I Filius* Nay, we gete nouȝt one worde in þis wonys.
> *II Filius* Do crie we all on hym at onys.
> *Al chylder* Oȝez! Oȝez! Oȝez!
> *Rex* O, ȝe make a foule noyse for þe nonys.
> *III Filius* Nedlyng my lorde, it is neuere þe nerre. (330-34)

Herod and his court thus "reduce" themselves from a state in which they use at least the semblance of civilized discussion and logical persuasion to a state in which they use senseless words or sounds as crude weapons of torture. This may be a consequence of their rejection of Christ the Word or of *Logos*, and / or it may be a way of actually effecting that same rejection. Herod's advisers have (rather insightfully) recognized that physical violence is not an appropriate way in which to answer or combat Christ's "insanity": "Itt is not faire to feght with a fonned foode," they inform their lord and master (294), nor is it particularly effective. Rather, they determine to answer Christ's madness -- his unwillingness to communicate as manifested in his silence -- with a little madness and incoherency of their own, and so they shout, "Oȝez! Oȝez! Oȝez!" Unfortunately, their attempt to fight fire with fire (anarchy with anarchy, plague with plague) is unsuccessful, and their captive remains "boudisch [peevish]" and unco-operative. "Mi lorde," *I Filius* informs his father, "all youre mutyng [disputing] amendis not a myte" (335). For this reason, Herod's son recommends that they have nothing further to do with the prophet. "To medill with a madman," he concludes, "is meruaille to me" (336).

They therefore decide to return Christ to Pilate, and thus physically expel the Word from their presence as they have already spiritually or symbolically expelled him from their language -- Herod orders the soldiers, "Wendis fourth, þe deuyll in þi throte" (398). Yet, before they send their captive on his way, they determine to assign signification to that which has refused to signify; they resolve to lend or to designate Christ a type of voice, to give him something material that will successfully communicate what he at present can or will not. Herod, his sons, and his soldiers dress Christ in a white robe to signify his madness, for, as Herod notes, "White clothis *we saie* fallis for a fonned ladde" (351, emphasis added). Of course, Christ's white robe, no matter what Herod and his court say or how often they say it, does not simply and unproblematically signify madness. To others, audience members mostly, it signifies purity rather than insanity, and "fallis" not for a fool but for an innocent man or sacrificial lamb. This alternate reading is one of which Herod and his court remain blissfully unaware, but were they cognizant of it, they would still remain utterly and totally indifferent. To accept the audience's Christian reading of the robe would involve accepting and recognizing the being within it, and would therefore necessitate the Jews' participation in the divine semiotic underlying, supporting, and guaranteeing the robe as sign. This is, of course, something that Herod and his perverse fellows cannot and will not do. They therefore dress their captive in white and send him stumbling on his way.

3. Strategy 2: The Oriental Hieroglyph

On 1 August 1931, Artaud attended a performance of the Balinese dance theatre at the Colonial Exhibition in Paris. This experience made a lasting impression on him, and helped solidify some of his ideas on the theatre, as well as on his new theory of "cruelty." He believed he recognized something elemental in the movements and gestures of the "Oriental" actor, something pure, something preserved from earlier ages and traditions. As he writes in *Theater and its*

Double, the ritualism and primitivism he believed characterized Eastern dramatic forms stood in stark contrast to the psychological realism that dominated the stages of the West. As the domain of the hieroglyph, the Oriental theatre acknowledged that "the stage is a concrete physical place which asks to be filled, and to be given its own concrete language to speak," while the Occidental theatre, the realm of the word, assigned the theatre a place "as a subordinate branch of the history of the spoken language" (37).[30] According to Artaud, this difference in opinion or valuation of the theatre evinced a state of advanced artistic and metaphysical decay in the West -- and not in the East as some would argue:

> this theater [the Oriental] is based upon age-old traditions which have preserved intact the secrets of using gestures, intonations, and harmonies in relation to the senses and on all possible levels -- this does not condemn the Oriental theater, but it condemns us, and along with us, the state of things in which we live and which is to be destroyed, destroyed with diligence and malice on every level and at every point where it prevents the free exercise of thought. (47)[31]

As discussed earlier, the word represents for Artaud the separation of thought and its expression. Because of his own frequent inability to communicate and even to form his own thoughts as words, he invested a great deal of time and energy in the search for alternative and more authentic media for communication. The Oriental theatre appeared to him a promising object of study, first of all because (as far as he could tell) it lacked spoken language, and second, because it developed in the actual space of the theatre and succeeded in making the abstract concrete. Mathematical and impersonal, the Oriental actors' "gestures, attitudes . . . sudden cries

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[30] "la scène est un lieu physique et concret qui demande qu'on le remplisse, et qu'on lui fasse parler son langage concret" (55); "on réserve dans les manuels d'histoire littéraire une place au théâtre considéré comme une branche accessoire de l'histoire du langage articulé" (55).

[31]
> ce théâtre s'appuie sur des traditions millénaires, qu'il a conservé intacts les secrets d'utilisation des gestes, des intonations, de l'harmonie, par rapport aux sens et sur tous les plans possibles, -- cela ne condamne pas le théâtre oriental, mais cela nous condamne, et avec nous cet état de choses dans lequel nous vivons, et qui est à détruire, à détruire avec application et méchanceté, sur tous les plans et à tous les degrés où il gêne le libre exercice de la pensée. (70-71)

. . . gyrations and turns which leave no portion of the stage space unutilized" appeared to Artaud to liberate "the sense of a new physical language, based upon signs and no longer upon words" (*TD* 54).[32] On the stage, the word as empty sign, as intermediary, becomes an unnecessary hindrance to communication as those thoughts which the actor's "intricately detailed gesticulation" aims at, "the spiritual states it seeks to create, the mystic solutions it proposes are aroused and attained without delay or circumlocution" (60).[33] The signified is somehow incarnated in the signifier -- the figure, costume, gestures, and expressions -- of the actor, who appears to be and operates as an animated hieroglyph (54).[34] As such, the actor does not merely signify or represent (and therefore conceal or veil) being, but coincides with being, with its fluxes, its "Whole ranges of feeling and endless ideas" (Greene, *Thought* 186-87, 188). Stage actions thus communicate authentically if not intellectually; everything on stage has "a precise meaning which strikes us only intuitively but with enough violence to make useless any translation into logical discursive language" (*TD* 54).[35] Thus, while the Oriental theatre succeeds in making the abstract concrete and therefore more certain and tangible, it renders it less explicable and categorizable.

Deleuze describes the effect as a "deep cleavage" in the surface of things, in the boundary that makes conventional language possible by separating sounds from bodies ("The Schizophrenic and Language" 284). "Without this surface that distinguishes itself from the depths of bodies," he writes, "without this line that separates things from propositions, sounds would become inseparable from bodies, becoming simple physical qualities contiguous with them . . ." (284-85) -- as supposedly occurs in the hieroglyph. Although he uses slightly different terms, Donald Maddox describes the process in much the same way, suggesting that Artaud's hieroglyph operates and communicates by interrupting established and opening new paths of communication. He writes: "While the intellectual sign is transparent enough in its conventionality to allow the intellect to conceptualize the signified without calling attention to the signifier, a 'true image' is so opaque, unconventional and startling that the intellect is abruptly short-circuited" (206). With the intellect paralyzed, "consciousness reverts to a sense of chaos" and the spectator's emotions "foster [an] imprecise 'metaphysical' intuition" (206). In a sense, the sign stalls and at the same time is fulfilled at the level of the signifier, forcing the spectator "into an awareness of an alternate reality, or Double" (208). The Oriental theatre and its hieroglyph is therefore both destructive and constructive; it

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[32] "à travers leur dédale de gestes, d'attitudes, de cris jetés dans l'air, à travers des évolutions et des courbes qui ne laissent aucune portion de l'espace scénique inutilisée, se dégage le sens d'un nouveau langage physique à base de signes et non plus de mots" (82).

[33] "Les pensées auxquelles elle ["cette gesticulation touffue"] vise, les états d'esprit qu'elle cherche à créer, les solutions mystiques qu'elle propose sont émus, soulevés, atteints sans retard ni ambages" (92).

[34] "Ces acteurs avec leurs robes géométriques semblent des hiéroglyphes animés" (82-83).

[35] "un sens précis, qui ne nous frappe plus qu'intuitivement, mais avec assez de violence pour rendre inutile toute traduction dans un langage logique et discursif" (83).

> becomes an imposition, an instrument of disruption, an incitement, and a liberation, so that the Artaudian user of signs, like the sorcerer and the shaman, is involved in what is essentially a vast semiotic project of manipulation. If Antonin Artaud was a user of signs to transform theater, he was in the final analysis a user of theater signs to modify the metaphysical and mythopoeic consciousness. (208).

This idea of the actor as shaman or sorcerer complements and perhaps derives from Artaud's earlier study of two other "Oriental" art forms: the Cabbala and Jewish mysticism. In his 1925-26 screenplay *Eighteen Seconds*, Artaud portrays one of his alter egos, the hunchback, in a feverish search for "the central problem, the one on which all the others depend" (trans. Weaver 116).[36] He does not hope to discover "the solution to the problem, but simply what this central problem is, what it consists of . . . how to state it" (116).[37] At first, searching for mystical enlightenment in smoky dens and ritual gathering places, he remains unmolested; but when he turns to a study of the dangerous Cabbala, he is immediately arrested and placed in a "madhouse" (117; "chez les fous," *OC* 3: 14). The Cabbala contains secrets: secrets of "the tempos of the breath" and its power (*TD* 134);[38] secrets of "mathematics" and "the subtle relations of Numbers" which govern creation ("A Voyage to the Land of the Tarahumara," trans. Weaver 381).[39] "There is in the Cabala a music of Numbers," Artaud writes, "and this music, which reduces the chaos of the material world to its principles, explains by a kind of awesome mathematics how Nature is ordered and how she directs the birth of the forms that she pulls out of chaos" (381).[40]

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[36] "le problème centrale, celui dont tous les autres dépendent" ("Les dix-huit Secondes," *OC* 3: 13).

[37] "Qu'il trouve non pas même la solution du problème, mais seulement quel est ce problème central, en quoi il consiste, qu'il trouve enfin à le poser" (*OC* 3: 13).

Jewish Cabbalists believed that "the letters of the Torah were essentially configurations of divine light" or emanations from God (Katz 73). As such, according to Umberto Eco, they constituted a divine language whose words "not only 'said' but 'did,' a language whose utterances set supernatural forces in motion" (*Search* 123). The Torah was at once an explication of, a commentary on, and the name of God itself (Katz 72). It was also considered a living, organic being that assumed and reflected the constant flux of creation in its letters and forms. The Torah could have been and would someday be otherwise because its "narrative, on the simplest level of meaning, was [and is] not fixed" (73). If, in the past, Adam and Eve had not sinned, the Torah would have reflected this, would have rearranged its letters to accommodate the alternate history; in like manner, when in future the Messiah arrives and creation is restored, the Torah will reorganize itself "to reveal entirely different meanings" (73; see also Eco *Search* 26). Even in its present, imperfect state, it was thought to possess nearly infinite significations -- every one of its letters "was said to have seventy meanings, or 'faces'" (Katz 73) -- and was believed to communicate perfectly -- every letter was described as a "thought rendered visible" (Greene, *Poet* 211). In a sense, like the Balinese actor, the Torah and its letters were considered to be perfect, organic hieroglyphs. They did not signify but rather embodied meaning, and enjoyed a subtle communication with the worlds of both God and humanity.

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[38] "les temps du souffle ont un nom que nous enseigne la Kabbale" (200-01).

[39] "la . . . mathématique secrète . . . [le] jeu subtil des Nombres" ("D'un Voyage au pays des Tarahumaras," *OC* 9: 47).

[40] "Il y a dans la Kabbale une musique des Nombres, et cette musique, qui réduit le chaos matériel à ses principes, explique, par une sorte de mathématique grandiose, comment la Nature s'ordonne et dirige la naissance des formes, qu'elle retire du chaos" (*OC* 9: 46).

For Artaud, the most promising aspect of the Oriental hieroglyph was its potential to liberate the individual actor / spectator from the grip of Western metaphysical notions of *Logos*, or the self-communicating divine presence (Metzeger and Coogan 463). In Occidental semantics, the word must be kept separate from (though related to) the Universal Idea, since, after the Fall, the former belongs to the realm of mere humanity while the latter pertains exclusively to the domain of God. Platonic Realism maintains that essences or ideas exist independently of our perception of them, and enjoy a greater reality than do their particular, ephemeral reflections; therefore, knowledge of these essences can only be gained by the spirit or intellect in direct communication with God. That the Platonic Idea truly exists, underlying and ordering the apparent chaos of the universe, is a belief contingent upon one's acceptance of the concept of God or *Logos*, or of a principle of ubiquitous intelligence or reason that not only produces rational and ordered activity to the universal good, but, on a much simpler level, guarantees the fundamental relationship between Idea and its expression (Angeles 158). As discussed earlier, Artaud was unwilling to accept this metaphysics of divine *Logos* and therefore to have faith or certainty in mere intellectual concepts; as a result, to him the chaos of the universe was more than just apparent. Having rejected God as a reliable medium or assurance of meaning, his only hope of certainty lay in the Eastern (and therefore pagan) hieroglyph, which not only reflects but manifests essence in each and every one of its particular expressions. Because it is at once signifier and signified, type and truth, is simultaneously the particular and the universal, the grossly physical and the divine, the hieroglyph eliminates the need for external guarantees of signification and therefore eliminates, even destroys, the speaking or reading subject's need for faith, whether that faith be religious or merely semantic.

Artaud, disillusioned with both Catholicism and conventional means of communication, welcomed the pagan East and its attendant rejection of Western faith with open arms. Given editorial control over the third edition of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, he entitled the publication *1925: Fin de l'ère chrétienne* (End of the Christian Era), and filled its pages with open letters assaulting "all the social, religious and medicinal bodies which the Surrealists held in contempt" (Barber 24-25) as well as with letters entreating various representatives of the non-Christian Orient (the Dalai Lama, the schools of Buddha) to save the Occident from its own "larvae" -- its writers, thinkers, doctors, and fools ("Letter to the Buddhist Schools," trans. Weaver 105; *OC* 1: 265). Robert Desnos, a member of Breton's original Surrealist group with whom Artaud formed a strong friendship and frequently collaborated, contributed to the 1925 edition an article on the Jewish diaspora entitled "Pamphlet contre Jerusalem." Jane Goodall describes the article as "a disturbing exercise in transgressive rhetoric;" she writes: "Desnos mimics through inversion the discourses of anti-semitism to portray the Jews as exiled Orientals who have become a kind of spreading cancer in the West, working from within to destroy and subvert its dangerous strengths" (*Gnostic Drama* 137). Desnos "argues against the return to Jerusalem on the grounds that it is imperative for the work of destroying the Occident to be complete" (137). The Jew and his particular way of signifying must not be allowed to become object or other, but must remain abject, a plague or disease within.

As with the Oriental plague, the Jew is not something completely external and foreign to the Occident. When he infects the West, he is actually making a perverse return; when he introduces the hieroglyph, he is reawakening a cruel, pagan knowledge still latent in Western notions of the sign. Before the rise of Greece and Rome, knowledge of the hieroglyph and its sacred nature was universal. However, when these two nations chose to distinguish themselves from the "barbarous fringe" ("frange de barbarie") which surrounded them and proclaimed themselves "civilized" ("civilisés"), they succeeded only in cutting themselves off from cruel "Tradition" and the knowledge it retained and transmitted (*Héliogabale* in *OC* 7: 18). Meanwhile, distanced from the West and its diseases, the Orient "was allowed to maintain contact with Tradition" -- a mixed blessing, Artaud writes, since "there are few operations more difficult in the world than preserving the notion, at once separate from and at the very heart of the organism, of a universal principle."[41] By welcoming the Orient back in from the barbarous fringe, the Occident -- "the respected sons of this stupid mother, the Roman empire"[42] -- would simply be making a return to its roots and origins. It would also be reaping the benefits of its own, rejected other's long, hard labour -- much as God or Spirit exploits the work of its physical, fleshly other. The diaspora had therefore to continue.

3.a. Exclusion and Return: Remembering the Jew

We see what appears to be a return of the excluded Jewish other, or more properly speaking, a *fantasy* of the return of the excluded Jewish other, in medieval representations of Host desecrations and ritual child murders. The Jews were, of course, physically expelled from England, France, Spain, and Portugal in 1290, 1349, 1492, and 1497 respectively. They were also, to a certain extent, symbolically expelled from Christianity's originary scene, the Crucifixion, in both artistic representations of the same and in the Mass. This expulsion made possible and even inevitable the return of the "Jew" to the corpus Christi as its threatening -- yet fascinating and morbidly titillating -- abject or "proximate."[43]

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[41] "a permis de garder le contact avec la Tradition . . . et il est peu d'opérations plus difficiles au monde, que de garder la notion, distincte à la fois et fondue dans l'organisme, d'un principe universel" (*OC* 7: 18).

[42] "les dignes fils de cette mère stupide" (*OC* 7: 18).

Nothing was allowed to detract from the centrality of Christ's body and physical suffering in visual representations of his death, and so Christ on the Cross often appears alone in paintings and on rood and choir screens.[44] More frequently, he is surrounded by a small group of spectators consisting of the Holy Mother, the other Marys, the apostles, and miscellaneous saints;[45] Jews seldom make up part of this crowd, and when they do, seem most often to be included for strictly historical reasons. On these few occasions, they are represented by and as a rather faceless and formless crowd, as in Hubert and / or Jan van Eyck's *Crucifixion* of 1420-25 (Janson, colour plate 61) and Cranach the Elder's *Crucifixion* of 1533 (Brown 37). The serene Christ, elevated and separated from a teeming, indistinct mass of Jews and Roman soldiers, remains at all times the central focus of the painting, as is proper. However, as a consequence, Jews at the moment of Christ's death in these and similar depictions appear trapped in a state somewhere between subject and object, between dynamic agent and scenic element or fixed backdrop.

Elsewhere, Jews are included as (and thus seem to be equated with) tools of the Passion. Sometimes represented by disembodied heads, they are static and inactive, staring passively out at the viewer or gazing, impotent, at the body of Christ. Along with the other instruments of the

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[43] Jonathan Dollimore's term. See my chapter one, 62, 86-87.

[44] A good example of this is the choir screen in Naumberg Cathedral, c. 1240-50. See H. W. Janson, plate 465.

[45] Saint John and the Virgin were most often included in representations of the Crucifixion, but other, even anachronistic, saints were sometimes added to the scene. Important patrons of the Church, dressed in medieval garb, on occasion worship at the foot of the Cross, emphasizing the importance of the Crucifix as an object of devotion. See, for example, the paintings of the Crucifixion, reproduced in Brown, *Religious Painting*, by the School of Constantinople (14th century), the Master of Flémalle (1435-40), Van der Weyden (c. 1441-50), Antonello de Messina (1475), Cranach the Elder (1503), Raphael (1503), Grünewald (1510), Joos van Cleve (c. 1520), and Bosch.

Crucifixion, they are arranged in neat rows or regular patterns around the cross, and seldom make direct contact with Christ's body (Bynum, *Fragmentation* 278, 279). Their final relationship to the Passion must be inferred: Christ's wounded, bleeding body (before or after the Resurrection) implies torture and crucifixion as a knock at the door implies the presence of someone outside wanting to be admitted, but the connection between the effect and its cause must ultimately be presumed.

In Goswyn van der Weyden's *Triptych of Antonius Tsgrooten* of 1507 (Bynum, *Fragmentation* 115), we see an uncharacteristically active Jewish head spitting in the general direction of the cross. His saliva does not reach its intended object, however, since Christ is no longer contained in the scene of the Crucifixion: he has already risen, and stands before the open tomb displaying his still-bleeding side wound. Here Christ appears almost three dimensional, while the Jews and the other instruments of the Passion -- the spear, the nails, the thirty pieces of silver -- seem confined to a two-dimensional plane located somewhere in the background. They are objects frozen in time, and their appearance perhaps even suggests that they are painted images (and thus mere signs or signifiers) at the scene of an already-established shrine. In this painting as in others, the Jews and their tools are established as the cause of Christ's Passion while they are, simultaneously, stripped of their agency, and effectively rendered powerless and non-threatening.

This exclusion and / or negation of the Jew in visual representations of the Crucifixion perhaps reflects his expulsion from the ceremony of the Mass. Paintings displayed on the rood and choir screens of churches, on their walls, ceilings, and altar panels, must have been read in the context of this central sacrament, which was celebrated daily and enthusiastically attended. As illustrations and illuminations of the historical moment that the Mass both remembers and re-enacts, painted Crucifixions reintroduce some of the violence -- the blood and wounds -- which the sacrament excludes or purifies; but on the whole, they reflect its sense of ritual and order. In *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages*, O.B. Hardison recognizes the double nature of the sacrament as ritual and remembrance, and acknowledges the tension as well as the communication that existed (and still exists) between these two aspects of the Mass:

> there are two concurrently developing patterns in the Mass. The first is the ritual, which, in spite of its highly stylized form, is a true and visible sequence of actions and texts. The ritual is timeless. It always occurs in the present and its central features are unchanging. It is not a representation but a re-creation. It is linked indissolubly with a second order of events which occurred in chronological time and which must therefore be re-created in the present by meditation -- by an effort of the memory heightened through contact with ritual. The two elements cannot be separated. The ritual is not 'pure' ritual (if such a thing can exist) but has explicitly rememorative parts, while the memory of the historical drama is colored and idealized in terms of the images furnished by ritual. (67-68)

This perhaps explains Christ's curiously atemporal appearance -- suffering of his own account and not at the hands of others, not wounded but already wounded -- in representations of the Crucifixion. The historical event had slowly been altered by the ritual celebration of the Mass.

However, as Hardison points out, there is no such thing as pure ritual, and the Mass itself must have "rememorative parts." From the ninth-century on, the Mass was interpreted allegorically by both members of the clergy and the laity (38-39); it was presented "as an elaborate drama with definite roles assigned to the participants and a plot whose ultimate significance [was] nothing less than a 'renewal of the whole plan of redemption' through the re-creation of the 'life, death, and resurrection of Christ'" (39). Hardison cites Honorius of Autun's *Gemma animae* as "Perhaps the most remarkable expression of this idea":

> It is known that those who recited tragedies in theaters presented the actions of opponents by gestures before the people. In the same way our tragic author [the celebrant] represents by his gestures in the theater of the Church before the Christian people the struggle of Christ and teaches to them the victory of His redemption. Thus when the celebrant [*presbyter*] says the *Orate* [*fratres*] he expresses Christ placed for us in agony, when he commanded His apostles to pray. By the silence of the *Secreta* he expresses Christ as a lamb without voice being led to the sacrifice. By the extension of his hands he represents the extension of Christ on the Cross. By the chant of the Preface he expresses the cry of Christ hanging on the Cross. (trans. in Hardison 39-40)

During the Mass, the celebrant most often portrays Christ himself, but as Hardison points out, "the roles of the participants are fluid," and so he can also represent "the High Priest of the Temple sacrificing the holocaust on the Day of Atonement" or "Nicodemus assisting Joseph of Arimathea at the entombment" (44). Similarly, the congregation can assume the role of "the Hebrews listening to prophecies of the Messiah, the crowd witnessing the Crucifixion, the Gentiles to whom the Word was given after it had been rejected by the Hebrews, and the elect mystically incorporated into the body of Christ" (44).[46]

However, roles are not so fluid that the celebrant or congregation ever represents the threatening, crucifying Jew.[47] Though central, his presence within the proper Mass and so, at the moment of the Crucifixion, is only inferred. The reasons for this are obvious -- no believer wishes to be associated with the persecutors of Christ, and it would certainly be inexpedient to compare the celebrant with one or all of Christ's torturers. As discussed earlier, the sacrament of the Mass was a celebration of Christian unity and of the individual's incorporation into the body of Christ; no faithful participant would willingly choose to portray those who had been ejected from that unified body -- at least within so sacred and central a sacrament. Accepting the Mass as both "sacramentum et exemplum," a sign of God's love and mercy and an example to be followed, the congregation simultaneously learns and participates in *imitatio Christi* -- not *imitatio Judaei*. However, because the idea of Jew as persecutor is necessary not only to the historical

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[46] This fluidity was common in medieval allegory or allegoresis. Saint Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana* explains that certain words or images may have multiple meanings, depending on the context -- either of the text itself or of the act of exegesis. He writes:

> A lion signifies Christ in this passage: 'The lion of the tribe of Juda has prevailed [Rev. 5.5];' but it signifies the devil in this other: 'Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking someone to devour [1 Pet. 5.8]' . . . . Similarly, other things are not single in their meaning, but each of them signifies not only two but sometimes even many different things, according to its relation to the thought of the passage where it is found. (145, 146; bk. 3, ch. 25)

[47] It would appear that the celebrant does so at the breaking of the bread, but this was not (officially) the case, at least not in the medieval West. According to Mozarabic and Byzantine tradition, the Fraction represents Christ's Crucifixion; however, in Western Roman readings of the Mass, including that of Amalarius, the Fraction represents the breaking of the bread by Christ at Emmaus, and therefore is associated with his risen, not crucified, body. See Hardison 45, 75-76.

Crucifixion but also to the ritual of the Mass and even to day-to-day Christian identity, he hovers in the shadows, the Christian's "double," threatening to return from the barbarous fringe.

He does so rather spectacularly in two related phenomena: myths of ritual child murder and of Host desecration. According to Joshua Trachtenberg, allegations of child murder accounted for at least 150 trials of Jewish men and women during the High Middle Ages (125). In England alone, two extremely popular martyrs, William of Norwich and Little Hugh of Lincoln, were said to have been ritually tortured and crucified -- even, in the case of Little Hugh, fattened up "on milk and other childish nourishment" to make a more pleasing sacrifice -- by local Jews (McCall 275). In Thomas of Monmouth's account of William's martyrdom, the young boy was gagged and bound to a cross on 22 March 1144, on the second day of the Jewish Passover. The Jews then "performed upon his body a ceremonial parody of the Crucifixion, which reached its dramatic conclusion with the boy's left side being pierced to the heart" (McCall 275). Matthew Paris gives a similar description of the torments said to have been inflicted upon Hugh in 1255, in his *English History*:

> on assembling, they at once appointed a Jew of Lincoln as judge, to take the place of Pilate, by whose sentence, and with the concurrence of all, the boy was subjected to divers tortures. They beat him till blood flowed and he was quite livid, they crowned him with thorns, derided him, and spat upon him. Moreover, he was pierced by each of them with a wood knife, was made to drink gall, was overwhelmed with approaches [sic] and blasphemies, and was repeatedly called Jesus the false prophet by his tormentors, who surrounded him, grinding and gnashing their teeth. After tormenting him in divers ways, they crucified him, and pierced him to the heart with a lance. (138)

One of the murderers later admits to his accusers that "almost every year the Jews crucify a boy as an insult to the name of Jesus" (139). He also admits that they disembowelled Hugh's corpse in order to "draw an augury from" it (139-140), and thus invokes the popular Continental belief that Jews used the blood and bodies of young Christian boys in their magic. The German theologian Johann Eck was of the opinion that

> Jews need Christian blood to anoint their rabbis; Jewish babies are born with two tiny fingers attached to the skin of their forehead (the very image of the Devil himself), and without Christian blood it is very difficult to remove these fingers without harm to the

> child; above all, Jews need Christian blood to wash away the blood stain inflicted on them by God because they had crucified Christ. (Hsia 127)

Christian blood was considered the "sole effective therapeutic available" to Jews who suffered from the ailments discussed in chapter one (Tractenberg 50). It could conceal or even heal those infirmities connected with the blood libel.

However, most authorities agreed that its procurement was not the sole or even principal reason for the alleged ritual murders. If it had been, there would be no explanation for the elaborate Crucifixion parody that supposedly characterized the killings, nor for the purported clustering of murders around the Jewish Passover or Christian Easter season. R. Po-Chia Hsia notes that by the 1470's, victims of ritual murder had become noticeably and suspiciously standardized: they were nearly all young boys between the age of infancy and age seven (55). Variants from the past (a seven-year-old girl murdered in Forchheim in 1261, for example) were gradually displaced and forgotten as "ritual murder discourse" became "a form of the imitation of Christ, in which the representations of the boy victims and the child Jesus became fused" (55). The Jews' acquisition of Christian blood, as useful as it was, was obviously a secondary objective. The real motive for the killings was the repetition of Christ's own murder, while the necessary consequence was the increasing blood guilt of the Jewish nation.

This association of the murdered children with the crucified Christ encouraged their similar identification with the desecrated Host. R.I. Moore estimates that accusations of Host desecrations against Jews accounted for perhaps another hundred trials on the Continent (*Persecuting Society* 38). Again, the discourse is quite standardized, and so the case of a number of Jews arrested, tried, and executed in Passau in 1478 can be taken as a fairly typical example of the "genre." Arrested for theft, Christoph Eisengreishamer confessed that he had stolen a number of Hosts from the church and had sold them to local Jews. The Jews he named were immediately arrested and subjected to torture, after which the magistrates of the city announced their findings.

The Jews had, they concluded, smuggled the stolen Hosts into the synagogue, and had stabbed one of them until it bled and turned into a young boy. They then threw all of the Hosts into an oven from which two angels and two doves flew. All of the Jews were subsequently executed. Three of the prisoners -- Eisengreishamer, and the two Jews who supposedly stabbed the Host -- were torn with glowing hot pincers before they were burnt alive (Hsia 51).

Thus Christ, child victims of ritual murder, and desecrated hosts "all blended into a single symbol of Christian sacrifice" (130), a single exemplum of *imitatio Christi*. Hsia writes:

> Human flesh, tortured, became divine and created an immediate salvic presence 'showing God's mercy' to the beholders. This process meant nothing less than a eucharistic sacrifice, a ritualistic variation of the Crucifixion, and a social mass, enacted in a drama and discourse, with a language drawn partly from the liturgy of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and partly from the vocabulary of popular magical beliefs. (130)

The idea of the Jew, excluded from the liturgy of the sanctioned Mass but retained in the popular imagination, made a horrible and horrifying return. The Christian feared that the Jew would enthusiastically embrace the role of persecutor created for him at the moment of Christ's Passion, and therefore he demonized and reviled him, subjecting him to unspeakably cruel methods of torture and execution. As either imagined child-murderer or Host-desecrator, the Jew embodied the central paradox of a dominant Christian ideology which needed, even demanded, itself to be dominated, and which therefore persecuted its imagined (and desired) persecutor.

3.b. The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*: The Lollard as Jew, the Jew as Lollard

All of this is nicely illustrated in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, a dramatic presentation of a miracle which, we are told, took place in Aragon, Spain in 1461 (ll. 57-60). The miracle is that of a Host desecration and child murder rolled into one: some Spanish Jews, having procured a Host from a wealthy Christian merchant, put it to a "new turmentry" (45), after which the boy Christ appears to them, displaying his bloody wounds.

Celia Cutts, in her influential 1944 article on *Croxton*, wonders, "Why was this particular 'foreign' subject chosen for an English play at this time" (45); that is, why had a fifteenth-century playwright decided to represent a Host miracle on the English stage, and, more troubling, why had he decided to set that miracle in Spain? Cutts' answer to her own question -- that the play is not really about Spanish Jews at all but about Lollard dissent in late fifteenth-century England -- appeared to her to solve both aspects of the problem. The subject matter was appropriate since the Host miracle demonstrated the truth of transubstantiation, something that Lollards as well as Jews were reputed to deny (51). Meanwhile, the "vague and foreign setting," she decided, evinced "a conscious attempt" on the playwright's part "to keep the doctrinal teaching on a high and spiritual plane" (47).

As discussed in my first chapter, all heretics were believed on some level to be connected to the Jews, but Lollards were especially and systematically compared to these arch-heretics. An obvious point of comparison between the two, as Cutts suggests, was their rejection of orthodox readings of the Mass. According to Catholic doctrine, the Host really and completely transubstantiates into the body of Christ at the words of consecration, and so is in no way a sign of Christ's body but is the signified body itself. The wafer retains its bread-like appearance after the substance of bread has been annihilated because in it there are "accidens sine subiecto," accidents without substance (Szittya 156). In a sense, the Host is a strange combination of the signifier of bread and the signified of body. According to Duns Scotus, such an unnatural and miraculous pairing can only be maintained by an act of the divine will (Szittya 156, n. 8).

As an extreme metaphysical Realist, Wyclif was deeply offended by the whole idea of accident without substance and of signifier without its corresponding signified. To suggest that substance or essence could be destroyed, and further, to suggest that accidents or appearance could exist independently of essence, was, in his opinion, grossly heretical. As Penn Szittya writes in *The Antifraternal Tradition*, Wyclif insisted that there is "no conflict in the host between appearance and reality, bread and Christ, because both [are] present" (157): "Although the consecrated host [is] the body of Christ it [is] still bread, both in accidents and in substance" (157). It is simultaneously *signum et res* -- "both a sign of the *corpus Christi* and not a sign, that is, the thing itself" (157). However, Wyclif's Host has little to do with the Eastern hieroglyph, since the former is only "panis in natura et corpus Christi in figura" (157):

> In its substance, the consecrated bread is still what it appears to be: bread. But in figure, it *is* (and does not merely signify) the body of Christ. On the natural level as bread, one might say the Host is a sign of the *corpus Christi*; but on the higher, figural level, by virtue of the consecration it is *vere et realiter* the body of Christ. (158)

Thus, the actual, physical substance of flesh is at no time present in the consecrated Host. Instead, the body of Christ appears in the wafer in much the same way as an image appears in a mirror, and is similarly distanced from its object or source (Phillips 253). According to Wyclif, all those who claim otherwise, who teach that the accidents of bread exist without the substance of bread, are mere "sign worshipers (*cultores signorum*), [and] teachers of signs (*doctores signorum*)" (Szittya 155). As such, they themselves must be read as ominous signs or portents: of the loosing of the Devil, of the approaching reign of Antichrist, and of the final return of the Lord (164-67).

Wyclif the Realist and his more Nominalist opponents did not then so much "disagree on the fact of transubstantiation" as "on its nature" (156). Ironically, Wyclif's explanation of the Host as simultaneously *signum et res* opened him to the very criticism he had levelled at the friars, and he was himself accused of reducing the sacrament to its sign or type. In this way, he and his followers resembled the Jews, who continued to perform Old Testament rites and sacrifices which had long since been superseded by New Testament sacraments. Since these rites and sacrifices originally derived their significance from the fact that they were signifiers or *types* of sacraments or truths to come, they had been emptied of all meaning at the time of Christ's Passion and were no longer valid. As Thomas Netter argues in his *Doctrinale fidei Catholicae*, by reading the Host as a sign and therefore type of Christ's body, Wyclif and his Lollards had become throw-backs and judaizers troubling the line between the Old Law and its fulfillment:

> Behold, wretched Wyclif: the blood on the altar is not *type* but *truth*, is not *figure* but *clarity*, is not the *shadow* of Christ's blood, but it in *nature*. The type of his blood was the blood of the paschal lamb; the type of his blood was the blood of the temple; the type of his blood was the sprinkling of the priests. What do you think about this? That [the blood of the altar] is nothing other than *type*? Chrysostom says no, but that it is *truth*. You say thus: it is truth in figure; therefore the blood of the [paschal] lamb was not so much type as truth, that is to say, truth in figure. And Chrysostom wrongly divides this *truth* of the blood from this *type*, since type is truth. But we will hold with the first [with Chrysostom].[48]

By equating type and truth as the Jews do, Lollards serve only the shadow of the law as expressed in sheep and calves, bread and ashes, all of which "are a long way from the substance expressed by their characters."[49] For this reason both are guilty of idolatry; again, this is the same accusation Wyclif levelled at the Catholic Church. Three types of worship were officially recognized: *latria*, the worship owed to God alone; *dulia*, the reverence owed to the created thing; and *hyperdulia*, the veneration which rightly belonged to Christ incarnate, who was both God and creature (Aston 141). One could commit idolatry actively -- by giving *latria* to an object created by human hands -- or passively -- by receiving *latria* from others (141) or by denying *latria* to someone (something) to which it was owed. Wyclif accused the clergy of active idolatry in their worship of images and of the consecrated Host.[50] In response, Netter accused his long-dead opponent of passive idolatry:

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[48] Ecce, miser Wicleff: ergo sanguis in altari non est *typus*, sed *veritas*; non est *figura*, sed *claritas*; non est *umbra* Christi sanguinis, sed *natura*. Typus ejus fuit sanguis Agni paschalis: typus ejus erat sanguis sanctuarii: typus aspersio sacerdotum. Cujus putas? Nunquid alterius *typi*? Chrysostomus dicit quod non, sed *veritatis*. Si dicas, ita veritatis in figura; ergo sanguis Agni fuit non typus tantum, sed veritas, scilicet, in figura: & male dividebat Chrysostomus, hinc *veritatem* sanguinis, hinc *typum*, cum typus esset veritas. Sed tendamus ad prima. ("De Sacramento Eucharistiae" 2: 180)

[49] "ipsi servierunt umbris legalium. Colebant ergo Judaei coecas umbras ovis & vituli, panis positionis, & cinerum: quae omnia longe sunt a corporis expresso charactere" ("De Cultu Imaginum" 3: 937).

> You see that all orthodox members are judged by him [Wyclif] to be idolaters; but it is thus necessary that he be judged an idolater. Because just as one is reckoned an idolater who worships with divine reverence that thing which is not God, so is he who denies divine reverence to that which is truly God. He [Wyclif] laughs at us because the pagans laugh at us in this. He judges the pagans to be honorable because they are consistent in their faithlessness. Why does he not therefore deny that Christ was crucified in his nature, and kill [him] in figure with Mohammed, which, according to Paul, is the greatest scandal of the Jews, truly a foolish people?[51]

Netter goes on to argue that, by refusing to accept the sacrament of the Eucharist as the actual body and blood of Christ, both Lollards and Jews repeatedly implicate themselves in Christ's murder and so brand themselves as Cainites:

> Abel's blood signifies the blood of Christ, to which truth the Universal Church, when it has perceived it, says *Amen*. For consider this if you are able: the Universal Church makes just such a clamour [as did Abel's spilled blood] while the blood of Christ is drunk, and says *Amen*. Therefore the Jews -- who are to be understood in [the figure of] Cain because, not believing in Christ, they do not drink the blood of Christ -- are cursed on this earth, which opened its mouth in confession and drank the blood of its brother, that is, of Christ, whose [blood] the Jews do not drink and therefore they are cursed. By the same reasoning, all Wyclifites are Cainites, and are cursed with the Jews, because they do not drink the blood of their brother Christ as did the earth, which, opening its mouth, cried out and drank; neither do they eat as did that pious ground, which ate the flesh of his body; for they do not believe in Christ's body and blood, which was taken from the altar, but in bread and wine, which are worth little in nature.[52]

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[50] On the subject of the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me," Wyclif writes in his *Sermones*: "Many transgress this commandment, foolishly worshipping images as well as the consecrated host" ("Contra hoc mandatum faciunt multi stolide adorantes ymagines ac ostiam consecratam;" qtd. in Aston 141, n. 26). According to Wyclif, these men and women are guilty of worshipping signs instead of the thing signified.

[51] Videtis orthodoxos omnes ab eo censeri idololatras; & necesse ita esse, vel ut ipse sit idololatra. Quia sicut est idololatra repuntandus, qui colit divino cultu, quod Deus non est: ita qui cultum divinum denegat ei, qui vere Deus est. Nos item deridet, quia pagani nos in hac re derident. Se honoratiorem aestimat, quia paganis in infidelitate cohaeret. Cur ergo Christum crucifixum in sua natura non abnegat, & in figura cum Mahumeto concedit, cum, secundum Paulum, est in maximum scandalum Judaeis; Gentibus vero in stultitiam? ("De Sacramento Eucharistiae" 2: 165)

[52] Sanguis Abel sanguinem Christi significat, quo Ecclesia universa percepto, dicit *Amen*; nam qualem clamorem faciat universa Ecclesia dum potatur sanguine Christi, & dicit *Amen*, tu ipse, si potes, considera. Judaei ergo, qui intelliguntur in Cain, quoniam non credentes in Christum non potantur sanguine Christi, maledicti sunt super terram illam,

Fortunately, true Christians are not fooled by Lollard attempts to privilege mere signifiers over signifieds, and therefore to deny the Host's (and by extension, Christ's) divinity. Netter writes: "Christians are not injured by Wyclifites, when they [the Lollards] throw them from Christ into the shadows of the Jews."[53] The reason for this, Netter explains, is that "we are all in the image of Christ."[54] Apparently, an understanding of the truth behind the type and the signified behind the signifier renders the believer immune from the Jewish / Lollard over-valuation of signs and so from their idolatry.

However, idolatry, or a preference for type over truth, is not the only point of comparison between the Lollard and the Jew and so is not the only threat they pose to good, Christian congregations. Netter suggests that the two also resemble one another in their valuation of good works and in the joylessness that characterizes their worship. Wyclif argued that the time wasted by both religious and lay folk in long communal prayers could be better spent in acts of charity: "God does not want us to engage excessively in long vocal prayers, but wants everyone to be in the prayer of a just life, or to direct their thoughts to good works."[55] He also cautioned his

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> quae aperuit os suum per confessionem, bibit sanguinem fratris sui, idest, Christi, quem Judaei non bibunt, ideo illi maledicti sunt . . . . Eadem ratione Wiclevistae omnes sunt Cainitae, & maledicti cum Judaeis, quia non bibunt sanguinem fratris sui Christi cum terra, quae aperiens os suum clamavit, & bibit; nec comedunt cum ipsa pia terra, quae corporis sui piscem comedit, eo quod nec credunt in Christi corpus & sanguinem, quae sumerant ex altari, sed in panem & vinum vilia per naturas . . . . ("De Sacramentalibus Missae" 3: 294)

[53] "Non injurientur Christocolis Wiclevistae, ut a Christi eos imagine in umbras jaciant Judaeorum" ("De Cultu Imaginum," 3: 937).

[54] "Ab imagine . . . Christo sumus omnes imagines" (3: 937).

[55] "Deus non vult nos esse in oratione vocali nimis prolixos, sed omnino ut orationi justae vitae, vel operis intendamus" (qtd. in Netter, "De Oratione in Communi" 3: 82).

followers and opponents not to place their hopes "in the prayer of another, but entirely in the justice of his own life."[56] To both of these charges, Netter replied:

> This was the arrogant heresy of newly converted Jews, saying that the Gospel and Christian grace were given to them because of their just life and good works, against which the Apostle said: *To him who works, the reward is not reckoned according to grace but according to debt* [Rom. 4.4]. This is as if to say: If a reward is owed to a just life or works, it is [reckoned] according to debt and not according to grace.[57]

When debt replaces grace in this manner, work replaces festival. Lollards follow the example of Jews in their rejection of church dedications and other celebrations, and so have adopted the joylessness of Jewish worship:

> It ought to be noted that when the Jews throughout the world had been captured by the Gentiles, they discontinued the practice of dedicating Churches; which custom the Christian Father[s], in whom the glory of the law was transformed, preserved. Along with renouncing the dedication of their temple[s], the Jews renounced being joyful. When these [practices] were adopted by the Wyclifites, they had no joy in Church festivals, but were somber as were the Jews.[58]

As Reginald Pecock points out in his *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, Lollards also shared a tendency to overvalue the written word with their Jewish counterparts. He compares the Lollard's stubborn adherence to Scripture and rejection of orthodox biblical commentary to the misguided loyalty demonstrated by newly-converted Jews toward the Old Law at the time of Paul's mission to Rome:

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[56] "nemo speret in oratione alterius, sed omnino in propria justitia vitae suae" (qtd. in Netter 3: 82).

[57] Haec etiam erat superba haeresis Judaeorum noviter conversorum, dicentium Evangelium & gratiam christianam eis esse datam propter justam vitam, & opera sua bona; contra quos Apostolus ait: *Ei, qui operatur, merces non imputatur secundum gratiam, sed secundum debitum;* quasi dicat: Si justitiae vitae, vel operis debetur merces, ergo secundum debitum, & non secundum gratiam. (3: 82-83)

[58] Notandum videtur, quod genti per mundam captivae obsolevit usus dedicandi Ecclesias; quem morem Patrum Christiani conservant, in quos legis gloria est translata. Unde Judaei simul cum templo dedicatione ejus, ne jucundentur, renuntiant. Cum his item captivi Wiclevistae, ne iucundentur in Ecclesiae festivitate, judaice contristantur. ("De Ecclesiarum Dedicatione" 3: 978)

> if ȝe bithenke ȝou weel how it is [now] . . . certis it is in lijk maner as it was bitwixe Poul and the Cristen whiche at Rome were conuertid fro Iewry into Cristenhede. Forwhi in the daies of Seint Poul Iewis and tho that weren conuertid fro Iewis lawe into Cristenhode magnifieden ouermiche the Oold Testament; for thouȝ the oold lawe was good to the kepers therof, ȝit it was not so good as thei maden therof, namelich in thilk degre in which thei conceueden it to be good; and Poul witing this repressid her ouer miche dignifiying of the oold lawe . . . . And euen lijk maner is bitwix ȝou and me in these daies. Forwhi many of the lay parti dignifien ouer miche the writing of the Newe Testament, and many other dignifien ouermiche the writing of al the hool Bible. (69; pt. 1, ch. 13)

By privileging Scripture over its learned and traditional exegesis, Lollards act like children who, preferring what is "delectable and sweete," eat nothing but honey (66-67; pt. 1, ch. 13). Gorging themselves on the Bible, but neglecting to consume along with it the authorized commentaries -- the *glossa ordinaria* -- they not only damage their own spiritual health but the spiritual health of the entire Church. Their appetite for Scripture alone causes them to suffer "losse of dewe nurisching" (67), while their rejection of the writings of the Catholic Fathers at the very least promotes schism within the Church:

> thouȝ suche clerkis ben [substanciali leerned . . . in logik and in moral philosophie and in dyvynyte, and ripeli exercisid ther yn] . . . the lay parti wolen not attende to the doctrine, whiche the clerkis mowe and wolen . . . mynystre to the lay parti; but the lay parti wolen attende and truste to her owne wittis, and wolen lene to textis of the Bible oonli, y dare weel seie so many dyuerse opinions schulden rise in lay mennys wittis bi occasioun of textis in Holy Scripture aboute mennys moral conversacioun, that al the world schulde be cumbrid therwith. (85; pt. 1, ch. 16)

For these reasons, Pecock regarded the Lollard practice of reading Scripture in the vernacular as extremely dangerous. Not only did the Wyclifites refuse to recognize authority in matters of interpretation, but, as indicated above, they tended to see only type where there was truth and to value signs above what those signs signified. As a result, they would and could only understand the Bible literally -- the same accusation that was levelled against the Jews. Lollards, by reading literally and by rejecting the orthodox spiritual teaching of the Church, necessarily and of their own free will elected to judaize.

In a typical Wyclifite exegesis of Scripture, the unknown author of a tract entitled "The Clergy may not Hold Property" argues that priests should not hold temporal possessions, basing his argument on a literal interpretation of both Old and New Testament texts. He explains how God "in þe olde lawe . . . made an ordynance how & wher-wiþ þai schulde lyue in every state, [and] he assigned þe worldly possescyons to þe seculer party, and bad þat prestis schulde by no way haue eny possescions wiþ þat oþer partye of þe peple"(Matthew 364). He insists that this old law was confirmed in the new by the fact that Christ himself appeared to be possessionless: "criste and his colage myȝt not be dispensid wiþ ne be exempte fro þe bondis of þe olde lawe in þis mater . . ." (366). In answer, an anonymous orthodox tract points out that the literal reading of Scripture and, more importantly, of Christ's life itself advocated by Wyclif and his followers by extension necessitates a complete (heretical) return to other Jewish practices:

> Here I say that the works of Christ and of the disciples are not always the best mediators of the laws of Christ, and so others ought not conform to them, as indicated by this proof: because Christ was a Jew all of his days, up to the night and early morning on which he was killed. That night he ceremonially ate the paschal lamb and kept the Jewish ritual. But if a Christian were to act as a Jew in this way he would sin mortally. And also the Apostles acted as Jews after they had become Apostles right up to the resurrection of Christ. And such judaizing is not the manner of Catholics. And thus it is concerning many other works which Christ and the Apostles did.[59]

By reading literally and therefore imitating too perfectly the actions of Christ and his apostles, the Lollard was in danger of becoming a Jew. Further, by publishing and circulating vernacular bibles, he posed a threat to well-intentioned Christians who, unlettered and so unable to read and interpret Scripture correctly, could easily slip into a literal, Judaic practice.

There is some evidence -- from Spain no less -- that Jews themselves were associated with vernacular biblical translation, which suggests yet another point of comparison between *Croxton*'s Jews and their supposed counterparts, the English Lollards. Unlike translations into other vernaculars, many late medieval and early modern Spanish bibles were based not on the Vulgate but on the Masoretic text (Morreale 468), and therefore on the Hebrew Bible as supplemented with vowel signs and marginal notes by Jewish scholars in the early Middle Ages (Metzger and Coogan 501). In addition, at least five of fourteen Spanish biblical manuscripts still extant appear to have been written by or for Jews, since they either follow the division of the Hebrew canon into Law and former and latter Prophets, or lack chapter divisions (Morreale 469). The most interesting of these five manuscripts, the Alba Bible of 1422-33, specifically targets both a Jewish and a Christian audience; its translator, Rabbi Mosse Arragel of Guadalajara, writes in his introduction that he intends to give a vernacular interpretation of both Latin and Hebrew terms "so that the Jew [will] not be startled by the Latin nor the Christian by the Hebrew words" (trans. in Morreale 480). The resulting text is a hodgepodge of Latin, Hebrew, and Judeao-Spanish, in which, according to Morreale, "rabbinic lore is combined with Catholic exegesis in the most heterogeneous fashion"(480).

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[59] Hic dico . . . quod non semper opera Christi & discipulorum . . . sunt optimi interpretes legis Christi, sic quod & allii debeant conformiter operari, ut innuitur in argumento: quia Christus judaizavit omnibus diebus suis usq*ue* ad noctem qua mortuus est mane. Unde & illa nocte comedit de agno paschali ceremonialiter & ritu judaico. Sed si quis Christianus sic modo judaizaret, mortaliter peccaret: & sic judaizaverunt Apostoli, postquam fuerunt Apostoli usque ad resurrectionem Christi: Et sic judaizare non est modo catholicum. Et sic est de multis aliis operibus, quae Christus & Apostoli fecerunt. (in Gratius 1: 224)

By the end of the fifteenth-century, inquisitors began actively seeking out and destroying such vernacular translations of the Bible in Spain. They seemed particularly concerned to find and confiscate those translations (of bibles or even prayer books) that were in the hands of Jews and could therefore be used to convert others to their faith:

> At the end of the fifteenth century . . . the attention of the Inquisitors was directed mainly against the use of Scripture by the Jews and particularly by relapsed neo-Christians or crypto-Jews . . . . The Inquisition feared that the Jews were turning their former co-religionists back to the Old Law through the use of vernacular bibles. In the trials of the period, prayer is likewise mentioned as a point of accusation: prayer in Hebrew and prayer in the vernacular. The first Hebrew printer in Spain, Juan de Lucena, was mentioned in a trial for having printed a Jewish *siddur* of prayers in the vernacular. (474)

Lollards in England were similarly believed to, and actually did, convert others to their religion through the use of vernacular bibles and other writings. According to Malcolm Lambert, a "Lollard community was above all a reading community, basing its common life on the public and private reading of the Scriptures and of Lollard tracts" (270). Thus conversions were effected by bringing neophytes, who were often illiterate, to these public readings for instruction (270-71). Although the Dominicans and Franciscans were not responsible for the Inquisition in England in the Middle Ages, bishops were as concerned as their Continental counterparts to find and destroy heretical tracts before they could do their damage. Even Sir John Oldcastle, a prominent member of parliament and friend of Henry V, was put to trial by Archbishop Arundel when a search of a scrivener's shop yielded a number of Lollard texts belonging to the knight (Keen 244).

Thus, the subject matter contained in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is not so foreign as it initially appears. Lollards were easily and often compared to Jews since both misread the sacraments and the Scripture in a similar way, reducing truth to its type and signifieds to their signifiers. Both then assumed that these literal readings provided examples to be followed in the present, and so either (allegedly) participated directly in *imitatio judaei* by crucifying small children and desecrating Hosts, or judaized indirectly by adhering to a literal *imitatio* of Christ, who, after all, "judaized all the days of his life." Even the play's setting may be less vague and inconsequential than Cutts assumes, since Spanish Jews and English Lollards were at very nearly the same time condemned for translating Scripture into their respective vernaculars.

This comparison of Jew and Lollard does not, however, justify the direct substitution of the latter for the former (allowing the complete circumvention of the problem of anti-semitism in the play) advocated in Cutts' analysis. According to Cutts, there is no anti-Jewish sentiment in the *Play of the Sacrament*, partly because of this direct substitution and partly because there was no Jewish community officially recognized in England at the time of the play's staging:

> A careful study of the history of the development and use of the Jew-Host stories reveals that they were usually, if not always, adduced for specific didactic purposes, whether to stir up anti-Jewish riots, or to convince people of the truth of the Real Presence of Christ in the Host, or to stimulate belief in the relics of a given shrine . . . . None of these purposes is suggested in the English play. There is no anti-Jewish -- or pro-Jewish -- atmosphere whatever, as, of course, might be considered natural in a country where for several hundred years the Jewish population was inconsiderable in number. (46-47)

This argument is unconvincing for a number of reasons. The absence of Jews in medieval England would hardly have effected a purging of anti-semitism in the population; even without an immediate object for their fear and hatred, English men and women could still fear and hate. They had not forgotten what Jews were reputed to believe in, to look like, to be like, or to do. Further, they understood that Judaism was alive and well in other countries of the world, and therefore anti-semitism is alive and well in *Croxton*.

As Cutts suggests, the Jews in the *Play of the Sacrament* may and probably do signify Lollards on one level, but this does not mean that they do not also signify themselves. As discussed in chapter one, Judaism and Wyclifism were often compared and conflated as two particular manifestations of a world-wide movement against the Church: in the words of the Fourth Lateran Council, all individual heresies are bound to one another by their tails (Peters 175). However, each one has a different face, and so the *Croxton* Jews engage in activities that are particularly Jewish. For example, Jonathas makes his living as a long-distance merchant, a profession that was at this time stereotypically associated with Jews (McCall 265). His merchandise is exotic and wonderful: he sells spices such as ginger, licorice, galingale, pepper, and cinnamon; as well, he deals in semi-precious and precious stones such as amethysts, beryls, toadstones, and carbuncles (*Croxton* 157-88).[60] Again, the merchandise Jonathas boasts of is particularly Jewish. Precious and semi-precious stones were reputed to have magical occult powers, and Jews, "who were the leading importers of and dealers in gems during the early Middle Ages, were commonly accredited with a certain specialization in their magic properties" (Trachtenberg 74). Spices were also considered magical as well as medicinal, and so were associated with Jewish sorcerers as well as physicians.

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[60] Jonathas' association with gems is important enough to be mentioned in the play's banns: "Anon to hym [Syr Aristorye] ther cam a Jewe . . . þe wyche hade gret plenté off precyous stonys" (17, 20).

The *Croxton* Jew is therefore not a transparent sign signifying "Lollard." He is to some degree opaque -- is "Jewish" -- and so draws attention to his nature as Jew, or as signifier. In a sense, he is a type or *figura* of the Lollard (or vice versa): the one prefigures the other while the other fulfills its predecessor. Both are separate, having their individual historical identities and peculiarities, and yet on some level are profoundly and inextricably connected. Thus the Host desecrator in the *Play of the Sacrament* is at once an abject English heretic and an exotic Spanish / Jewish other; he is at once a revolutionary within and an adversary without. The object makes a perverse return in his double figure: the Jew returns to England in the form of the heretical Lollard, while the Lollard returns to the scene of Christ's Crucifixion in the form of the Jew.

3.c. Reading the Sacrament Literally: Christian versus Jewish / Lollard Semiotics

Within the Christian semiotic, the Host is unmistakably, "transparently," the body of Christ. That its accidents seem to be those of bread contributes to the strange phenomenon of transubstantiation, since the wafer is not what it appears to be. And yet, to the Christian viewer, its appearance signifies nothing, or rather, signifies something other; the very "rupture . . of meaning between visible and invisible" in the sacrament, "the excess of the signified over the sign," strengthens and clarifies the connection between these respective terms for the sacramental reader (Beckwith, "Sacramentality and Dissent" 264). Beckwith writes: "Since God cannot be understood propositionally . . . he has to be not so much understood, as approached;" thus "the meaning of the symbol of the sacrament is necessarily equivocal, opaque, pointing always and inevitably beyond itself, and so promising plenitude because it is always wanting" (268). God manifests himself in the opaque symbol because "the possibilities of meaning are inexhaustible" there (268); however, in the process, the opaque symbol is, in the minds of believers, rendered transparent. According to Beckwith, "the doctrine of transubstantiation claims the greatest allegiance and the maximum faith from participants in the mass precisely because of its flagrant transgression of the evidence of the senses" (264). Within the Christian semiotic, the Host is simply understood (not perceived) to be the body of Christ, and is treated accordingly -- that is, ritualistically, with great reverence.

Within the Jewish semiotic, however, the Host remains opaque and therefore stalls at the level of its signifying accidents. It remains bread, as the *Croxton* Jews repeatedly assert.

> JONATHAS. Þe beleve of thes Cristen men ys false, as I wene;
> For þe beleue on a cake -- me thynk yt ys onkynd.
> And all they seye how þe prest dothe yt bynd
> And be þe myght of hys word make yt flessh and blode
> . . . .
> JASON. Yea, yea, master, a strawe for talis!
> That ma not fale in my beleve
> . . . .
> MASPHAT. Yea, I dare sey feythfulli þat ther feyth [ys false:]
> That was neuer he that on Caluery was kyld,
> Or in bred for to be blode yt ys ontrewe als. (199-202, 205-206, 213-15)

Although the Jews tell their supplier Aristorius that they require a Host in order to test the claim that it is Christ's body and blood and so to determine whether or not Christ himself is divine (291-92), it seems that they have already come to a decision on the matter. On one level at least, the Jews have determined that, because the Host appears to be bread, it must literally be bread. They understand Christian teaching on the subject, but categorically reject it.

Jonathas and the other Jews do not appear unfamiliar with any aspect of Christian law and allegorical reading. Not only do they demonstrate an intellectual understanding of the doctrine of transubstantiation, they also show that they are familiar with the moment of the sacrament's alleged institution and with its subsequent historical development:

> JONATHAS. Thes Crysten men carpyn of a mervelows case;
> They say þat þis ys Jhesu þat was attayntyd in owr lawe
> And þat thys ys he þat crwcyfyed was.
>
> On thes wordys ther law growndyd hath he
> That he sayd on Shere Thursday at hys sopere:
> He brake the brede and sayd *Accipite* [take],
> And gave hys dyscyplys them for to chere:

And more he sayd to them there.
Whyle they were all togethere and sum,
Syttyng at the table soo clere.
Comedite [hoc est] *Corpus Meum* [eat, this is my body].

And thys powre he gaue Peter to proclame.
And how the same shuld be suffycyent to all prechors. (394-406)

They can recite New Testament Scripture, and so are acquainted with Christian interpretations of "historical" events such as Christ's birth, the Resurrection and Ascension, and later, Pentecost and the speaking in tongues:

JASON. They say of a maydyn borne was hee,
And how Joachyms dowghter shuld be hys mother,
And how Gabrell apperyd and sayd 'Aue';
And with þat worde she shuld conceyuyd be,
And þat in hyr shuld lyght the Holy Gost
. . . .
JASDON. But they make a royall aray of hys vprysyng:
And that in euery place ys prechyd farre and nere.
And how he to hys dyscyples agayn dyd appere,
To Thomas and to Mary Mawdelen,
And syth how he styed [ascended] by hys own power
. . . .
MASPHAT. Yea, and also they say he sent them wytt and wysdom
For to vnderstond euery langwage;
When þe Holy Gost to them come,
They faryd as dronk men of pymente [a spiced drink] or vernage [white wine].
(410-14, 419-23, 425-28)

They are also familiar with New Testament prophecy and with the eschatological significance of the Eucharist -- Malchus complains, "Yea, yet they saye as fals, I dare laye my hedde, / How they that be ded shall com agayn to Judgement, / And owr dredfull Judge shalbe thys same brede . . . (433-35). This unreasonable Christian belief, Malchus explains, developed all "Because that Phylyppe sayd for a lytyll glosse . . . *judecare viuos et mortuos*" (438, 440). The idea was subsequently promulgated by Christians for the sole purpose of threatening Jews into conversion: "To turne vs from owr beleve ys ther entent" (439). Jonathas expresses a similar sentiment when he complains that priests who espouse the doctrine of transubstantiation "thus be a conceyte . . . wolde make vs blynd" (203). Allegorical readings or "spiritual truths," he suggests, are nothing but attempts to trick Jews away from the one true faith. As the central mystery of Christianity, the Host, "thys bred that make vs thus blynd" (388), is simply the most important and threatening of the priests' heretical deceptions.

The *Croxton* Jews' familiarity with Christian teaching thus in no way implies their acceptance of it, as Pharaoh's and Herod's foreknowledge of messianic prophecy in no way signifies their acceptance of the Messiah. Jonathas and his fellows deny transubstantiation, and brand as "Ageyns owr law . . . [a] false heresy" the notion that Christ was divine and was the expected Saviour (415). However, though they reject Christ's divinity as well as his presence in the bread, they do not dispute the historical fact of his execution and death. New Testament accounts of Christ's Passion are recognized as (to some degree) accurate since they are corroborated by ancient Jewish texts:

> JONATHAS. Ther stanyd were hys clothys, þis may we belefe;
>   Thys may we know, ther had he grefe.
> For owr old bookys veryfy thus.
>   Theron he was jugett to be hangyd as a thefe . . . . (444-47)

From the Jews' point of view, as history, accounts of Christ's death can only be read literally and therefore cannot provide a justification of or a basis for Christian faith. However, perversely, they can be used as models for behaviour, examples to be followed and endlessly repeated. As discussed above (230), a literal interpretation of figural Scripture will of necessity cause the unwary reader to judaize; thus Jonathas' and the other Jews' recognition of Christ's death as literal, historical fact paves the way for its eventual repetition. An aggravating factor is, of course, the Christian claim that the Host is literally and truly the body of Christ -- this provides the Jews with the perfect opportunity to put their inevitable repetition into effect. They observe the accidents of bread and therefore infer the presence of bread; at the same time they will address Christian claims that the bread is really Christ's body by treating the wafer exactly as though it is. Jason suggests that the historical Crucifixion, as chronicled in New Testament Scripture and ancient Hebraic texts, might provide the Jews with an appropriate course of action in the present, an effective strategy for dealing with the simultaneously dangerous and ridiculous Host:

Yff þat thys be he that on Caluery was mad red,
Onto my mynd, I shall kenne yow a conceyt good:
Surely with owr daggars we shall ses on thys bredde,
And so with clowtys we shall know yf he haue eny blood. (449-52)

The other Jews immediately and enthusiastically agree to Jason's suggestion. Jasdon vows that they will "fray" the Host just as "he [Christ] was on þe rood, / That he was on don with grett repreue" (455-56), while Masphat advises his fellow conspirators to stab the Host no more than five times so that its wounds might correspond to those suffered by Christ at his death (457-60). Malchus goes on to specify where the dagger wounds should be inflicted: the wafer is first to be stabbed four times on its outside edge (thus repeating the wounds in Christ's hands and feet; 468 s.d.), and is then to be pierced for the fifth and final time through its middle (thus repeating the spear wound to Christ's right side; 463-64). After this lengthy discussion, the Jews finally act.

JASON. Haue at yt! Haue at yt, with all my myght!
Thys syde I hope for to sese!
JASDON. And I shall with thys blade so bryght
Thys other syde freshely afeze!
MASPHAT. And I yow plyght I shall hym not please,
For with thys punche I shall hym pryke.
MALCUS. And with thys augur I shall hym not ease,
Another buffet shall he lykke.
JONATHAS. Now am I bold with batayle hym to bleyke,
Þe mydle part alle for to prene;
A stowte strok also for to stryke --
In þe myddys yt shalbe sene! (469-80)

This style of language should remind us of dramatic representations of the Buffeting and Scourging of Christ, as well as of his Crucifixion:

2 Tortor. Now fall I the fyrst
To flap on his hyde.
3 Tortor. My hartt wold all to-bryst
Bot I myght tyll hym glyde.
1 Tortor. A swap, fayn if I durst,
Wold I lene the this tyde.
2 Tortor. War! lett me rub on the rust,
That the bloode downe glyde

As swythe.
3 Tortor. Haue att!
1 Tortor. Take þou that!
2 Tortor. I shall lene the a flap,
My strengthe for to kythe. (Towneley 22.170-82)

The similarity is not surprising. The Passion sequences and plays were themselves vivid, literal representations of historical events and were even, in their own way, repetitions of those events. Conversely, the Jews' desecration of the Host in *Croxton* is a kind of Passion play in which the central role of Christ has already been cast by Holy Church. Jason, Jasdon, Malchus, Masphat, and Jonathas are not the Jews who originally tormented Christ at his Crucifixion, but they certainly attempt a close imitation in their words and actions. In turn, the Jews (on one level) assume that the Host cannot be the actual, political upstart executed all those years ago by their ancestors and progenitors, yet perversely decide to treat it as if it were.

In so doing, the Jews either betray a serious misunderstanding or a keen appreciation of the nature of the Mass, which Anthony Kubiak describes as "not precisely theatre but a dramatic inversion of it" (49). Theatrical and sacramental "representations" are ultimately incompatible because the former involves the practice of reading signs that are not what they appear to be while the latter involves the practice of reading a sign that appears to be what it is not:

> The Mass did not openly declare the illusory nature of truth, but was perceived instead through the eyes of faith as a *real* event, an actual historical return (albeit 'bloodless') of the events of Christ's passion . . . . One can appreciate the complicated texture of this mimetic inversion in the central sacramental image of the Mass, the Transubstantiation, in which the problematic of appearances central to theatre is turned inside out: whereas in the ontological perception of theatre, illusion is embraced as truth, in the Mass empirical reality is presented as an illusion that conceals truth (as for example, when the actual bodily presence of Christ is revealed under the *appearances* of bread and wine). (49)

The Jews' reduction of the sacrament to the level of theatrical representation is in effect an admirable and appropriate attempt to defy Christian teaching. Their strategy all along has been to repeat and represent (and so perhaps to parody) the events of Christ's Passion, but to do so within the context of the sacrament of the Mass. Unlike unbelievers in the majority of Host miracles, they are not passive, sceptical observers of the sacrament, but are active participants in a ritual they regard as nothing more or other than empty theatre. Immediately upon receiving the Host from Aristorius, the Jews not only take on the dramatic roles of sadistic torturers, but also assume the *personae* of celebrants or priests. It is in this capacity that Jonathas orders Jason to improvise an altar:

> Now, Jason, as jentyll as euer was the lynde [lime tree],
> Into the forsayd parlowr preuely take thy pase;
> Sprede a clothe on the tabyll þat ye shall þer fynd,
> And we shall folow after to carpe of thys case. (389-92)

Jonathas then speaks the crucial words of the liturgy at which point the bread becomes body:

> He brake the brede and sayd *Accipite*,
> And gave hys dyscyplys them for to chere:
> And more he sayd to them there,
> Whyle they were all togethere and sum,
> Syttyng at the table soo clere,
> *Comedite Corpus meum*. (399-404; see above, 235-36)

Finally, he and the other Jews rehearse the articles of the Creed: "They say of a maydyn born was hee . . ." (see above, 236). Astute Catholics will note that the Jews' Mass differs from the proper Mass in this unusual placement of the Creed -- its recitation should precede, not follow, the words of consecration. This seems a minor alteration in form, however, especially since, with the bleeding of the Host, the Jews are revealed to be entirely effective celebrants. Having flippantly decided that the Host will stand for Christ in their deviant theatrical production, the Jews are surprised to learn that it is actually Christ. However, more shocking still is their discovery that, by playing at being Catholic priests, they have assumed more than just empty roles. They have, in a sense, become the characters they initially set out only to mimic.

This having been said, it must be acknowledged that, within the play, prior to the desecration, the Host is consecrated by an ordained Catholic priest in the course of a regular celebration of the Mass from which, of course, the Jews are excluded. Aristorius tells the audience it will be a relatively simple task to steal a wafer from the pyx in Sir Isodyr's church since the priest "hath often sacred [consecrated] as yt ys skyll" (363). He states a second time that the Host has been consecrated when he delivers the stolen goods into Jonathas' hands: "Here ys þe Host," he says, "sacred newe" (379). However, this is the last we hear of its prior consecration, which is only ever reported and never actually seen. In contrast, the Jews' repetition of the Mass is detailed and immediate: the audience sees the Jews' improvised altar, not the altar inside the church, and hears the words of consecration spoken by Jews, not by Sir Isodyr. The spectator's only immediate experience of the Mass is of the *Jews'* Mass, and so, although technically speaking the Jews do not effect the miracle of transubstantiation, they appear to do so. *Croxton*'s systematic and striking Mass parody -- an element not generally found in other accounts of Host desecrations[61] -- must then at least trouble the distinction between the "proper" Catholic Mass and its improper Jewish double.

3.d. Agency and the Playing of the Sacrament: The Mass as Formula

Jonathas' and his followers' apparently (if deceptively) effective Mass may be read as an answer to Lollard claims that sinful priests were unworthy and unable to celebrate the sacrament:

> þe preiers of cursed prestis in þe masse ben cursed of god & his angelis, & certis a prest may be so cursed & in heresie þat he makiþ not þe sacrament. & god only knowiþ whanne his synne is in þat degre & whanne in lesse, but euere it is harmful to him þat makeþ þe sacrament vnworþily. ("Of Prelates," in Matthew 102)

The Lollards here indirectly address a question that also concerned Catholic thinkers at the time: the problem of how exactly consecration of the Eucharist was brought about, and under what circumstances it could and would not be accomplished. Ritual form played a part in the successful act of consecration, and so exact repetition was stressed in each and every performance of the Mass. Miri Rubin, in *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, writes:

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[61] See Muir, "The Mass on the Medieval Stage" and Homan, "Two *Exempla*: Analogues to the *Play of the Sacrament* and *Dux Moraud*."

> What was desired and necessary was that every priest, in every parish, at every altar, during every mass, should encapsulate the church's message of mediation, in a way that was recognisable, uniform, and supportive of sacramental claims. This meant that the mass was designed as a ritual in which the words of consecration, said at every altar, by every priest, conjured the same very body of God, without fail. (52)

Books and pamphlets were written to correct aberrations that had developed in the form of the Mass, and to prescribe the exact moment of adoration, the number of allowable elevations, as well as the types of gestures and even the tone of voice appropriate to the ceremony.[62] To this already considerable list of conditions required for effective consecration, the Lollards added still another: moral integrity for the celebrating priest.

If ritual repetition guarantees consecration, then this suggests that Christ himself is in some way vulnerable to or controlled by liturgical form, as Rubin acknowledges:

> sacramental religion meant that the eucharist celebrated thousands of times every day all over Christendom was efficacious once the words were pronounced over a proper species and by an ordained priest. It contained a miracle become rule, a procedure *ex opere operato*, which went against the grain of the miraculous (God's willed and deliberate intervention for the just), at the same time opening the eucharist to assimilation into the world of artifact and mechanical procedure. (114)

The miracle of transubstantiation then resembles a simple magic trick, and the tightly regulated Mass is, ironically, subjected to endless variation. Its liturgy is reduced to an infinitely repeatable incantation, and becomes available for use and abuse by countless celebrants. Slight changes in the performance of the Mass and of other Church rites were thus popularly believed to redirect, not to nullify, ritual power:

> Magical manipulation usually followed some ritual pattern which was inverted or incorporated into other procedures . . . . The mass for the dead could be inverted and

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[62] Rubin summarizes Henry of Hesse's fourteenth-century pamphlet, *Secreta sacerdotum*:

> The words of the canon, the most solemn part of the mass, were to be uttered neither too slowly nor too fast, and only in a measured tone. The sign of the cross was to be made with two fingers, the index signifying prudence and the middle finger symbolising justice, thus signifying the double nature of the sacrament, deity and humanity. (*Corpus Christi* 96).

> injure living enemies: waxen images were placed under the altar pall so that masses for the dead [might] be said over them, and these images would harm those represented in them . . . . *Dives et Pauper* describes a practice of dressing the altar with mourning clothes and singing a requiem for a living person in order to cause him or her suffering. (338)

It initially appears that the success of the Jews' Mass in *Croxton* depends upon its resemblance to orthodox ritual. Theirs is a magic inversion of the sacrament near enough to the "real" thing to be effective but distinct enough to achieve a completely different end. Just what exactly that "end" is is rather difficult to determine: the Jews repeatedly state their intention "To prove in thys brede yf þer be eny lyfe" (460) -- that is, to prove that there is not -- while the Banns suggest that the Jews steal the Host in order to "wreke" or avenge themselves on the Holy Sacrament by putting it to "a new passyoun" (31, 38). Of course, these two motivations are completely contrary, since the former assumes that the Jews do not believe in transubstantiation and the latter assumes that they do. However, as has been discussed, contradiction is the hallmark of the stereotypical Jew, who is blind to Christian truths yet somehow understands and rejects them.

3.e. Agency and the Playing of the Sacrament: The Mass as Sadistic Institution

The *Croxton* Jews are therefore not confused when they express a desire to inflict pain upon the Host whose subject-hood they supposedly deny -- just appropriately perfidious. Their black Mass takes on increasingly sadistic elements as it progresses, up to and including the point at which they stab the Host. Already at the beginning of the play, the Jews can scarcely contain their violent impulses: responding to Jonathas' first mention of the doctrine of transubstantiation, Jasdon declares, "I wold I wyste how þat we myght yt [the Host] gete; / I swer by my grete god, and ellys mote I nat cheue / But wyghtly theron wold I be wreke" (210-12). Not to be outdone, Malchus proclaims: "That brede for to bete byggly am I bent. / Onys out of ther handys and yt myght be exyled, / To helpe castyn yt in care wold I counsent" (218-20). Their enthusiasm only grows once the bread is actually in their possession, as their feverish declarations effectively demonstrate: "with owr daggars we shall ses on thys bredde" (451); "with owr strokys we shall fray hym as he was on þe rood" (455); "We wyll not spare to wyrke yt wrake" (459); "On lashe I shall hyme lende or yt be long" (468). As illustrated in these examples, the Jews initially refer to the Host as both "it" and "he." As the actual stabbing draws near and takes place, however, they use the latter with much more regularity: "we shall know yf *he* haue eny blood" (452); "I shall *hym* not please, / For with thys punche I shall *hym* pryke" (473-74); "with thys augur I shall *hym* not ease, / Another buffett shall *he* lykke" (475-76); "Now am I bold with batayl[illegible] *hym* to bleyke" (477). This pronoun shift seems to indicate that, as the climax of the Jews' Mass draws near, the entire process becomes less an experiment to prove or disprove Christian claims than a pleasurable infliction of pain upon a helpless victim.

The Jews' agency at the time of Christ's Passion, as well as their agency in the Middle Ages -- a time of supposed well-poisonings, child murders, and Host desecrations -- was represented as an extreme form of sadism, as described by Gilles Deleuze in *Sacher-Masoch: An Interpretation.*[63] Sadism involves more than just the pleasurable infliction of pain upon an unwilling victim; more fundamentally, it concerns itself with establishing and maintaining power structures which then allow this pleasurable infliction of pain to occur. The sadist thinks in terms of institutions, which "determine a long-term state of affairs which is both involuntary and inalienable; it [the institution] establishes a power or an authority which take affect [sic] against a third party" (67-68). Because the institution "tends to render laws unnecessary, to replace the system of rights and duties by a dynamic model of action, authority and power" (68), "the impulse at work in the case of the institution is towards the degradation of all laws and the establishment of a superior power that sets itself above them" (68). Although the Jews adhere mindlessly to Old Testament Law and therefore to sacrifice instead of sacrament, to type instead of truth, they recognize its emptiness and thus perversely choose a hollow institution over the living Word. According to Martin Luther, their rejection of the new law instituted by Christ is a reaction against its contractual nature. They object to the way in which the Gentiles (who previously constituted an affected yet excluded third party) have now been included in negotiations:

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[63] I am grateful to Jeffrey Cohen for allowing me to read a draft of his paper "Masochistic Conjointure and the Corpus of Lancelot (Masoch / Lancelotism)." His discussion of Deleuze's *Sacher-Masoch* in relation to Chrétien's *Lancelot du Lac* helped clarify my thinking on the *Play of the Sacrament*.

> Yes, this is it, this is the bone of contention . . . that makes the Jews so angry and foolish and spurs them to arrive at such an accursed meaning, forcing them to pervert all the statements of Scripture so shamefully: namely, they do not want, they cannot endure that we Gentiles should be their equal before God and that the Messiah should be our comfort and joy as well as theirs. I say, before they would have us Gentiles . . . share the Messiah with them, and be called their co-heirs and brethren, they would crucify ten more Messiahs and kill God himself if this were possible, together with all angels and creatures, even at the risk of incurring thereby the penalty of a thousand hells instead of one . . . . They alone want to have the Messiah and be masters of the world. The accursed Goyim must be servants, give their desire (that is, their gold and silver) to the Jews, and let themselves be slaughtered like wretched cattle. They would rather remain lost consciously and eternally than give up this view. ("On the Jews and their Lies" 215-16)

The Jews have no fear of nor respect for the new law, which will punish them eternally. In order to maintain their hollow status as chosen people, they willingly give the institution of Old Testament law authority over God himself, and therefore privilege the word over the Word, the flesh over the spirit, the bread over the body. In so doing, they not only themselves reject the semiotic system which equates the Host with the signified of body, but, in *Croxton*, point out the absurd consequences of such a system. If the Host is the body of God, it is extremely (and paradoxically) vulnerable, and if it is a remembrance and a re-enactment of Christ's Crucifixion, it conceals and sanitizes in its form a good deal of past and also present physical violence.

3.f. Responding to the Other Literally: The Fatal, Seductive Object

Beryl Smalley cites Origen's *De Principiis* in her discussion of literal versus spiritual or allegorical interpretations of Holy Scripture:

> Origen justifies the 'spiritual interpretation' from the impossibility of understanding a precept like: *if thine eye offend thee pluck it out* according to the letter. Scripture for him was a mirror, which reflected the divinity now darkly, now brightly; it had body, soul, and spirit, a literal, moral, and allegorical sense, the first two for 'simple believers' who were 'unable to understand profounder meanings,' the third for the initiates, the Christian Gnostics, who were able to investigate *the wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom of God.* (8-9)

Jews and Lollards were purported to read literally, according to the letter. In *Croxton*, they read the consecrated Host on the level of appearance, and so recognize and understand it only as bread. Unlike these Jews and / or Lollards, however, good Catholics see beyond the appearance of bread and recognize in the Host the essence of body and blood. The Host, like Scripture, has its body, soul, and spirit, but perversely, its body is bread, while its soul and spirit are body.

By denying the spiritual body of Christ in the Host, the Jews / Lollards pluck out their own eyes in response to the command, "if thine eye offend thee . . . ." Their actions bear a striking resemblance to those of a woman (the seductive object) described by Baudrillard in his *Fatal Strategies*:

> And so the cruel story of the woman to whom a man has written a passionate letter and who asks in her turn: 'What part of me seduced you the most?' To which he replies, 'Your eyes,' and receives by return mail, wrapped in a package, the eye which seduced him.
>
> The beauty and violence of this defiance against the platitude of the seducer. But also the diabolism of this woman, who takes revenge against the very wish to be seduced: trap for trap, eye for eye. Never did punishment take so awful a form as in this unscrupulous offering. She loses an eye, but he loses face -- how will he be able from now on to 'cast an eye' on a single woman without being afraid of getting one in return? For really nothing is worse than to utter a wish and to have it literally fulfilled; nothing is worse than to be rewarded on the exact level of one's demand. He is caught in the trap by an object that surrenders to him as a literal object.
>
> This is the portion of fatal provocation which is in each object, always ready to renew the cruel game of seduction. The man cannot but respond to the woman's engaging question: 'What part of me do you find most attractive?' and commits thereby an irreparable mistake. The vengeful logic of the object is there first of all. (We might

> wonder what would have happened if he had replied: your voice, your mouth, your sex, your soul, your look, whatever -- but this question is no doubt meaningless, for in the courtly context the only possible reply is the eyes as metaphor for the soul.)
>
> This is, in fact, exactly the metaphor that the woman chooses to repudiate, which privileges her absolutely. He, as subject, can play only the game of the metaphor. She, abjuring all metaphor, becomes the fatal object which drags the subject down to annihilation. (120-121)

The Jews ask, "What is the Host?" and Christian law replies, "The body and blood of our Saviour." To this answer Christ concurs, adding the simple command, "Do this in remembrance of me." In response to this answer and command, the Jews reject the Host and therefore the Mass as "metaphor" -- that is, as a ritual, stylized remembrance -- repeating instead the literal, historical Crucifixion with their daggers, piercing the surface of language to return to and wound the body. As Baudrillard points out, nothing is worse than to utter a wish and have it literally fulfilled; nothing is worse than to be rewarded on the exact level of one's demand. Christ as subject, as God, can play only the game of ritual and metaphor, of spirit, and so when the Jews unexpectedly respond to his request by abjuring all ritual and metaphor, all spirit, he is caught in a trap of his own devising and so suffers and bleeds.

Yet, the Jews' literal response is not completely surprising -- just as Artaud's "horrible sickness of the mind" supposedly prevented him from addressing the Word spiritually, with empty verbiage and inauthentic thought, the Jews' extra-textual construction as poor readers prevents them from responding to Christ in a spiritual, allegorical, non-carnal way. As discussed above, free will and determinism clash in the figure of the medieval Jew. Although it was generally agreed that he was a willful agent who freely chose the literal over the spiritual, it was also agreed that, in his state of advanced spiritual blindness, the literal was all that he could see. Of course, Baudrillard's assertion that the woman described in his scenario could choose to act other than she does is equally debatable. In the Middle Ages, women were as strongly identified with the body and its limitations as were the Jews; as Bynum writes, "Asymmetrical valuing of the genders and some association of male with spiritual and rational, female with fleshly and irrational, were seldom completely absent from medieval gender imagery" (*Fragmentation* 156). Evidence of women's modern association with the body can be found in the nearest corner store or movie theatre. Representations of women in pornography and horror movies effectively demonstrate that the woman in Baudrillard's scenario has actually been constructed to pluck out her own eye -- as has been the *Croxton* Jew. The threat she / he poses is therefore nonexistent, is merely titillating and distracting to the male / Christian subject, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Strategies of Resistance: God versus Humankind, God versus God

1. Deleuze and Artaud: The Interdependence and Equality of Sadistic and Masochistic Scenes

In *Sacher-Masoch*, Gilles Deleuze maintains that sadism and masochism are incompatible in practice. He cites the old joke -- "Did you hear about the masochist who begged the sadist to hurt him? The sadist refused" -- and concludes that this hypothetical scenario would simply never occur. There can be no such thing as a sado-masochistic complex since a "genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochistic victim . . . . Neither would the masochist tolerate a truly sadistic torturer" (36). The sadist requires an unwilling participant for whom pain means nothing but pain and for whom death means nothing but death. In contrast, the masochist needs someone "to educate and persuade . . . in accordance with his secret project" (36). This someone (for Deleuze, always a woman)

> cannot be sadistic precisely because she is *in* the masochistic situation, she is an integral part of it, a realization of the masochistic fantasy. She belongs in the masochistic world, not in the sense that she has the same tastes as her victim, but because her 'sadism' is of a kind never found in the sadist; it is as it were the double or the reflection of masochism . . . . She does indeed belong essentially to masochism, but without realizing it as a subject; she incarnates instead the element of 'inflicting pain' in an exclusively masochistic situation. (37,38)

Yet, if the sadist and masochist never actually wish to meet, their roles or identities are connected, even dependent, at a very basic level. The fantasy of the sadistic scene justifies or supports the masochistic, and vice versa; in different but mutually supportive ways, both originate within and rely upon the family and the law, yet end with their destruction. Simultaneously attracted and repelled, the sadist and the masochist revolve around one another. Perhaps even more than the masochist and his or her dominatrix or dominator, they are mirror images or doubles, relying upon, even as they distinguish themselves from, their other.

In Deleuze's sadistic fantasy, the father unites with the daughter against the mother, the principle of procreation, of familial obligation, and therefore of the law (52). The mother must be negated in favour of the father who is "beyond all laws" (52), who "represents nature as a primitive anarchic force that can only be restored to its original state by destroying the laws and the secondary beings that are subject to them" (52) and by establishing the institution. Paradoxically, the father "can only be a father by . . . dissolving the family and prostituting its members" (52) -- not only because this destruction represents the ultimate power or prerogative of the god-like (patriarchal) sadist, but because the intact family makes possible a union between the mother and the son, between the law and its agent, against the tyrannical father. This is the revolutionary union the sadist fears and takes steps to prevent.

Meanwhile, in the masochistic fantasy, the father's disruptive, lawless presence impels the son to form an alliance with the mother, or with the law. He does so in order to prevent the imagined return of the sadistic father, establishing a contract with the woman, giving her certain rights over him for a certain period of time (58). This contract "presupposes in principle the free consent of the contracting parties and determines between them a system of reciprocal rights and duties; it cannot affect a third party and is valid for a limited period" (67). Unlike the sadistic institution, the contract "actually generates a law, even if this law oversteps and contravenes the conditions which made it possible" (68). In short, "the specific impulse underlying the contract is towards the creation of a law, even if in the end the law should take over and impose its authority upon the contract itself" (68). Deleuze writes: "By this means the masochist tries to exorcise the danger of the father and to ensure that the temporal order of reality and experience will be in conformity with the symbolic order, in which the father has been abolished for all time" (58).

However, the masochist, too, paradoxically succeeds only in destroying that upon which he depends or relies, for his compliance with the law is excessive and therefore demonstrates its underlying anarchy and fundamental lack of reason or logic:

> A close examination of masochistic phantasies or rites reveals that while they bring into play the very strictest application of the law, the result in every case is the opposite of what might be expected (thus whipping, far from punishing or preventing an erection, provokes and ensures it). It is a demonstration of the law's absurdity. The masochist regards the law as a punitive process and therefore begins by having the punishment inflicted upon himself; once he has undergone the punishment, he feels that he is allowed

> or indeed commanded to experience the pleasure that the law was supposed to forbid. The essence of masochistic humour lies in this, that the very law which forbids the satisfaction of a desire under threat of subsequent punishment is converted into one which demands the punishment first and then orders that the satisfaction of the desire should necessarily follow upon the punishment (77)

The masochist is as "insolent in his obsequiousness, [as] rebellious in his submission" (78) as the tyrannical, sadistic father is obsequious and submissive to the law of patriarchy in his apparent lawless insolence and rebellion.

Thus the sadistic threat justifies or sustains the masochistic scene, while the masochistic threat justifies or sustains the sadistic scene; in turn, both dissolve or destroy the law which the former claims to reject yet embraces, and which the latter claims to embrace, yet rejects. This is effectively dramatized in Artaud's *Les Cenci*, a strange amalgamation of "Stendahl's masculinist and anticlerical glorification of the figure of Francesco Cenci as a metaphysical rebel" and "Shelley's feminist idealization of Beatrice" (Stout 95). Artaud's version of the Cenci myth contains two powerful heroes -- one sadistic, one masochistic; he therefore "creates a more ambivalent" -- a more balanced, a more circular -- "version of the story . . . than either of his precursors produced" (95).

Francesco Cenci is presented as the ultimate sadist, reading himself as a force above and beyond the law:

> In my dreams I often find that I am destiny personified. Yes, *that* is the explanation of my vices: I tell you that the fountain of hatred welling up inside me is powerful enough to drown all my nearest kin. I feel -- I know -- that I am a force of nature. For me, life, death, god, incest, repentance, crime do not exist. I obey my own law. I can look into myself without becoming giddy, and so much the worse for anyone who trips and topples into the abyss which I have become. (17; 1.1.)[1]

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[1] il m'arrive plus d'une fois en rêve de m'identifier avec le destin. C'est là l'explication de mes vices, et de cette pente naturelle de haine où mes proches sont ceux qui me gênent le plus. Je me crois et je suis une force de la nature. Pour moi, il n'y a ni vie, ni mort, ni dieu, ni inceste, ni repentir, ni crime. J'obéis à ma loi qui ne me donne pas le vertige; et tant pis pour qui est happé et qui sombre dans le gouffre que je suis devenu. (*OC* 4: 191)

A paranoid fantasy of masochistic rebellion sustains Cenci's hatred for his wife and sons and fuels his sadism. He refers to his family as a wound (32; *OC* 4: 218; 2.1.) and accuses Lucretia and the children of plotting his death, or at least, his imprisonment in an insane asylum:

> Tyranny is my one last weapon to frustrate the war you are plotting against me . . . the war you are waging against me and which I am more than capable of returning in kind . . . . Not content with murder, you make use of criminal slander. In your fear of what my piercing mind might detect, you have done your best to get me locked up as a madman. You, my daughter Beatrice, and my sons . . . all of you were part of the vile plot. (33; 2.1.)[2]

It is for this reason that Cenci celebrates the deaths of two of his sons with a banquet / mock sacramental feast, at which he proclaims, "my disobedient and rebellious sons are dead . . . two bodies less to trouble me" (24; 1.3).[3] "The priest drinks his God at mass," he states matter-of-factly; "Who then can prevent me from believing that I am drinking the blood of my sons?" (25; 1.3.).[4] Cenci is not entirely misguided or mistaken in his distrust of the children, as is effectively dramatized in Giacomo's conversation with Camillo in 2.2.. Here it is revealed that Giacomo has appealed to the Pope (and therefore to ecclesiastical law) to intervene in the case of his disinheritance; however, the Pope has refused, leaving the younger Cenci no legal recourse in his struggle against the older Cenci's tyranny. Giacomo realizes that he has no choice but to wage war on his father -- "So I must do battle, must I?" he asks Camillo; "I must seize my own father by the scruff of his neck?" (35).[5] Camillo in response encourages his friend to take up arms, stating,

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[2] La tyrannie est la seule arme qui me reste pour lutter contre la guerre que vous tramez . . . celle que vous me faites et que je sais encore mieux vous restituer . . . . Quand le meurtre ne vous suffit pas, vous utilisez la calomnie criminelle. Comme mon esprit trop pénétrant vous gêne, vous avez cherché à me faire enfermer comme fou.
Toi, ma fille Béatrice, et mes fils . . . tous, vous étiez de l'immonde complot. (*OC* 4: 219, 220)

[3] "mes fils désobéissants et rebelles sont morts . . . deux corps de moins à me soucier" (*OC* 4: 203).

[4] "Le prêtre boit son Dieu à la messe. Qui donc peut m'empêcher de croire que je bois le sang de mes fils?" (*OC* 4: 204).

[5] "Alors, je dois me battre, la guerre? Il faut que je prenne mon père au collet" (*OC* 4: 223).

"with this devil of a Cenci we are in an age where the father's narrow despotism provokes their sons into rebellion" (35).[6] Still, he doubts that Giacomo has the courage to do what he must. "Of all the Cenci's," Camillo reproaches him, "you are the only one capable of trembling at the idea of a murder" (35).[7]

Part of Giacomo's problem is that he himself has become a husband and a father, and therefore is troubled by paranoid, sadistic fantasies of his own. He tells Camillo that his father has robbed him of his own family's love: "He has made me a cuckold, a laughing-stock. Yes, that is what I am in the eyes of my own wife. She feels nothing but contempt for me, and her sons hover about her life like unspoken reproaches" (36).[8] Giacomo thus cannot belong or involve himself exclusively in the masochistic scene with his mother against his father -- he is too consumed by hatred for his own wife and is too suspicious that his own sons, if unchecked, may rebel. Giacomo is, Artaud suggests, in the process of becoming his father, and therefore does not present a masochistic threat to Francesco Cenci. Although part of the plot to kill him, Giacomo does not seek to kill his father in order to "Unite" with his mother and sister "against [a] warped authority" and to "Rebuild a family" (43; 3.1.), as Orsino encourages Beatrice and Lucretia to do.[9] Rather, Giacomo rejects all unions, familial or not, along with all authority. "Family, gold, justice," he declares after the plot to assassinate his father has been hatched, "I despise them all" (44).[10]

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[6] "avec ce diable de Cenci, ce sont les pères dont le despotisme sectaire pousse les fils à se révolter" (*OC* 4: 224).

[7] "De tous les Cenci, tu es le seul que l'idée d'un meurtre puisse faire trembler" (*OC* 4: 224).

[8] "Cocu et roulé. Voilà ce que je suis aux yeux de ma femme qui ne consent pas à me pardonner. Et ses fils bougent autour d'elle comme des reproches qu'elle me ferait" (*OC* 4: 226).

[9] "Contre une autorité dévoyée, faites bloc. Recontruisez une famille" (*OC* 4: 240).

[10] "La famille, l'or, la justice, je mets tout dans le même panier" (*OC* 4: 242).

The real threat to Cenci's power lies in a union between Beatrice and Lucretia, between the daughter with whom Cenci tries himself to form an incestuous alliance and her step-mother. Early on, Beatrice identifies her father as an oppressive force in her life, equating him with fate or destiny, as Cenci himself has already done. She tells Orsino, her lover: "It is not the Church or your heart which keeps us apart, Orsino: it is fate . . . . My father -- he is my unhappy fate" (20; 1.2.).[11] "There is something more than a man pacing up and down within these vile walls and forcing me to remain here," she complains (120)[12]; later, in 3.1., she recounts the details of a disturbing recurrent dream she had when she was a child:

> I am naked in a large room and a wild animal, the kind that appears in dreams, is breathing heavily . . . . I realize that my body is shining. -- I want to escape, but first I must hide my blinding nakedness . . . . At that moment a door opens . . . . I am hungry and thirsty and, suddenly, I discover that I am not alone. (41; 3.1)[13]

Lucretia offers an interpretation of the dream which coincides with Beatrice's own. "Your dream simply says what I already know," she tells her step-daughter, "that no one can escape his fate" (41; 3.1.).[14]

Yet, Beatrice confesses, "There are two dear names which make my servitude bearable" (20; 1.2.).[15] Beatrice's family -- her mother and her brother Bernardo -- tie her to the castle perhaps more strongly than does her father. "The sufferings of Bernardo and my mother come before my thoughts of you, Orsino," she admits to her lover; "For me, love no longer has the virtues of suffering" (20; 1.2.). "Duty is my only love" she concludes (20)[16] -- duty, not to a sadistic masculine authority, but to a maternal, familial morality and law. Her break with authority is effected during Cenci's celebratory banquet, in which Beatrice pleads with her father's guests to rise up against him in defence of the family: "For pity's sake, do not go, noble guests. You are fathers. Do not leave us with this savage beast, or I shall never be able to look at the white hairs of an old man without feeling the desire to blaspheme fatherhood" (26; 1.3.). In response, Cenci fuels his guests' own sadistic paternal fantasies. He admits, "She speaks the truth; you are all fathers," and then warns, "Which is why I advise you to think about your offspring before saying a single word about what has just happened here" (26; 1.3.). Beatrice then confirms Cenci's caveat, threatening divine retaliation against her father: "Take care, lest God, receiving the curse of an evil father, should give weapons to his sons" (26; 1.3.).[17] However, at the end of the play, Beatrice has finished even with God and therefore with all paternal authority. "I tell you this," she declares, "it is bad that fathers should band together against the families they have created" (57;

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[11] "Ce n'est pas l'Eglise ni votre coeur qui nous séparent, Orsino, mais le destin . . . . Mon père. -- Voilà mon mauvais destin" (*OC* 4: 196).

[12] "Il y a quelque chose de plus qu'un homme qui va et vient dans ces murailles de misère, et me force, moi, à rester" (*OC* 4: 196).

[13]
> Je suis nue dans une grande chambre et une bête, comme il y en a dans les rêves, n'arrête pas de respirer.
> Je me rends compte que mon corps brille. -- Je veux fuir, mais il faut que je dissimule mon aveuglante nudité.
> C'est alors que s'ouvre une porte.
> J'ai faim et soif et, tout à coup, je découvre que je ne suis pas seule. (*OC* 4: 236)

[14] "Il n'était pas besoin de ton rêve pour me faire dire qu'on n'échappe pas à sa destinée" (*OC* 4: 237).

[15] Watson-Taylor's translation here (as elsewhere) seems a bit loose. The original reads: "Il y a . . . pour dure qu'elle me paraisse, ma servitude a des noms chers" (*OC* 4: 196). A more literal

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translation would be: "There is, however difficult it might seem to me, my servitude to [two] dear names."

[16] "Avant Orsino, il y a Bernardo, il y a ma mère qui souffre.
L'amour, pour moi, n'a plus les vertus de la souffrance. Le devoir est mon seul amour" (*OC* 4: 196-97).

[17] BÉATRICE, *leur barrant la sortie*. -- Par grâce, ne vous en allez pas, nobles hôtes. Vous êtes pères. Ne nous laissez pas avec cette bête sauvage, ou je ne pourrai plus voir une tête blanche sans éprouver le désir de blasphémer la paternité.
CENCI, *s'addressant aux convives qui sont tous tassés dans un coin*. -- Elle dit vrai: vous êtes tous pères. C'est pourquoi je vous conseille de songer aux vôtres avant d'ouvrir la bouche sur ce qui vient de se passer ici . . . .
BÉATRICE. -- Toi, prends garde.
Prends garde, si Dieu reçoit la malédiction d'un mauvais père, qu'il ne donne des armes à ses fils. (*OC* 4: 206-07)

4.3.).[18] "The Pope's cruelty matches the cruelty of old Cenci," she proclaims, and therefore orders Camillo, "Let no one ever dare mention the name of God to me again" (57, 58; 4.3.).[19]

Just before her execution, Beatrice worries that she will experience a horrible revelation at the moment of her death: "Oh my eyes, what a dreadful vision you will see as you die. How can I be sure that, down there, I shall not be confronted by my father? The very notion makes my death more bitter. For I fear that death may teach me that I have ended by resembling him" (60; 4.3.).[20] John Stout notes that "the allegory of cruelty presented in *Les Cenci* . . . involves an interplay of victimizer and victim in which the distinction between the two breaks down; the two exchange places" (86) and are rendered equal. Both Cenci's and Beatrice's revolutions are circular and self-destructing -- both father and daughter die, and both succeed only in destroying that upon which they depend. Beatrice and Lucretia kill Francesco, the raging tyrant who draws them closer together in their fear and hatred of him, with the ostensible goal of saving the family; instead, they destroy it, as Bernardo is the only family member not sentenced to die for the crime. In turn, Francesco Cenci's "acts of violence toward his children and wife imply a wish to control the family and to subordinate it to his will" (100). Cenci attempts to become an absolute patriarch, a father and a sadist beyond all law, but in so doing, subverts patriarchy. "Paradoxically, in using his patriarchal role to control the family, Cenci commits crimes that negate the social functions of paternity" (100), and that even physically destroy the powerbase from which the father derives his authority. Cenci sets out to eliminate the family he must tyrannize, and therefore undermines his own position and strength.

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[18] "il n'est pas bon que les pères s'unissent contre les familles qu'ils ont créées" (*OC* 4: 267).

[19] "La cruauté du pape rejoint celle du vieux Cenci . . . . Eloigne-toi de moi, Camillo. -- Qu'on ne me parle plus jamais de Dieu" (*OC* 4: 266, 268).

[20]

> Mes yeux, sur quel affreux spectacle en mourant vous vous ouvrirez.
> Quel est celui qui pourra m'assurer que, là-bas, je ne retrouverai pas mon père.
> Cette idée rend ma mort plus amère.
> Car j'ai peur que la mort ne m'apprenne
> que j'ai fini par lui ressembler. (*OC* 4: 271)

According to Jane Goodall, "Cenci identifies with the plague that has taken possession of him, harnessing the full power of his conscious volition to the impulses it generates" and thus embraces his own final destruction ("Artaud's Revision" 123). In similar yet converse manner, Beatrice, Lucretia, and Cenci's sons end by resembling "those plague victims described in *The Theater and its Double* who proudly examine their unblemished bodies in the mirror, unaware of their advanced state of internal dissolution" (123). Thinking themselves other than the sadistic Cenci, other than the plague victim and his double the tyrant, they fall over dead, their shaving mugs still in their hands.

2. Agency and the Playing of the Sacrament: Christ as Plague, Christ as Masochist

In the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, both Lollard and Jew are portrayed, in the figure of the desecrator, as embodiments of a threatening Orient who, unlike either orthodox Realists or Nominalists, read and treat the Host as an inscrutable hieroglyph. Insisting at once that the Host is mere bread and is real body, the Jew / Lollard drags the divine down into the physical and reduces the sacrament of the Eucharist to the level of sign.

Jonathas and his fellows attack their helpless "victim" with a ferocity that belies their repeated assertions that the Host is mere bread. They are constructed as powerful, threatening sadists as well as effective celebrants, and therefore appear to be the agents in control of the ritual scene. Then something strange happens. The Host begins to bleed, effectively demonstrating that the Jews have succeeded in their attempts to control and inflict pain upon it -- yet they are far from pleased. Indeed, the sight of blood literally frightens them out of their wits:

> JONATHAS. Ah! owt! owt! harrow! what deuyll ys thys?
> Of thys wyrk I am in were;

Yt bledyth as yt were woode, iwys;
But yf ye helpe, I shall dyspayre. (481-84)

They immediately begin to refer to the bleeding Host as "it" instead of "he." Given irrefutable proof that the bread is (or at least acts as if it is) a sentient being over which they have power and control, the Jews deny that proof and therefore deny their own sadism.

They become obsessed with staunching the Host's relentless bleeding and therefore with erasing the very sign that indicates the successful attainment of their former, sadistic goal. They throw the Host into a cauldron of boiling oil in an attempt to cook it, "That nothyng therof shalbe rawe" (668), but the cauldron bubbles over, revealing the oil itself to have transubstantiated into blood (672 s.d., 674-75). Jonathas then suggests that they throw the Host into a hot oven, assuring the others that this will finally "stanche hys bledying chere" (687). Of course it does not. Instead, the stage directions tell us, "the owyn . . . ryve[s] asunder and blede[s] owt at þe cranys" (712 s.d.). The Jews, so successful in their attempts to wound the Host, are utterly ineffective in their efforts to deny what they have done, to stop what they have started.

Part of the problem is that, from the stabbing of the Host onward, they have made no contingency plans, and so the Host's response to their actions takes them completely by surprise. Quite obviously, the boiling of the Host did not form part of the Jews' original plan to celebrate the Mass or to re-enact the Passion, since they have made no preparation for it. Before anything can be done, Jason and Jasdon must start a fire, Masphat must find both an oven and a cauldron, and Malcus must fetch some oil:

JASON. A fyre! a fyre! and that in hast!
Anoon a cawdron full of oyle!
JASDON. And I shalle helpe yt were in cast,
All þe thre howrys for to boyle!

MASPHAT. Ye, here is a furneys stowte and strong,
And a cawdron therin dothe hong.
Malchus, wher art thow so long,
To helpe thys dede were dyght?
MALCUS. Loo, here ys fowr galouns off oyle clere. (485-493)

When the above preparations have been made and Jonathas attempts to drop the wafer into the boiling oil, the Host sticks fast to his hand and the Jews must again think on their feet. They nail the Host to a post only so that they might "pluke hys armes awey" from it" (513), but of course this does not work and Jonathas' hand is pulled from his body. It is thrown along with the Host into the cauldron and boiled, where, unlike the Host, it cooks up very nicely: Jason, removing both the wafer and Jonathas' limb from the hot oil, observes that "The hand ys soden, the fleshe from þe bonys" (706). The Host is then thrown into the oven in a last, desperate attempt to stop its bleeding. Again, the oven's fire has still to be stoked. Masphat provides straw and thorns for this purpose (693), while the other Jews "Blow on fast" to make the fire "brenne clere" (696, 697).

Because the Jews never intended to continue their little game past the initial stabbing of the Host, they find that they are not quite up to the task when compelled to do so. Jonathas, the leader of the group, actually becomes incapable of making considered judgements, especially after the Host sticks to his hand. He repeatedly proclaims that he is going mad -- "I wylle goo drenche me in a lake. / And in woodnesse I gynne to wake!" (501-02); "I am nere masyd, my wytte ys gon" (655) -- proclamations borne out in the succinct (if gestically vague) stage direction, "*Her he renneth wood*" (503 s.d.). Because Jonathas is their leader, his madness is highly contagious to the other Jews: Malchus, when the cauldron bubbles over with blood, confesses, "I am so aferd I am nere woode" (676). It is also highly debilitating to his dependent followers who, completely at a loss for what to do, timidly approach Jonathas -- who is mad and has twice asked them for help (484, 656) -- for advice or "counsayle" in these matters (680). In response, Jonathas promises them "The best counsayle that I now wott, / That I can deme, farre and nere" (681-82), but in the state he is in, his best cannot be very good. At the very least, he is in no condition to consider and appreciate the full significance of the course of action he suggests the other Jews take -- that is, to "throw yt [the Host] into the ovyn fast" (686).

The Jews' actions subsequent to the stabbing of the Host are therefore presented as rough and desperate improvisations, or still worse, as products of insanity. Yet, these actions are not without significance and so appear far from random. As Ann Eljenholm Nichols has demonstrated, historical repetition in *Croxton* continues right through to the bursting of the oven. The Jews fasten the wafer to a post using three nails (508) and thus effectively crucify it a second time. However, because their goal is entirely practical -- they want only to remove the Host from Jonathas' hand -- the Jews seem totally unconscious of the significance of their actions. They appear similarly oblivious to possible readings of the Host's immersion in oil, which, as Nichols points out, constitutes a highly stylized burial:

> The boiling in oil parallels the anointing of Christ's body. First the Host is wrapped 'in a clothe' (l. 659) just as in N-Town the body is wound in the 'syndony' provided by Joseph [34.138]. Then the Host is cast into the cauldron of oil, paralleling the 'onyment' that Nicodemus brings 'to Anoynt with all myn lord jhesu' [140-41]. (125)

The Host is later placed in the oven, which the Jews seal with clay in order that "non heat shall cum owtte" (711); according to Nichols' interpretation, the clay closes and seals the oven just as the stone closed and sealed the entrance to Christ's tomb (125). Subjected to intense heat and flames, Christ in the form of the Host harrows hell all over again, and when the oven bursts and the image of the wounded child appears, he is simultaneously born and resurrected anew (125). Christ's entire life from birth to Crucifixion and Resurrection is thus repeated, though the Jews only initiate and carry out the Crucifixion. It therefore seems that someone and / or something else sustains and finishes what they have only begun.

There must be two agents in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. This fits first of all with contemporary readings of the Crucifixion, which simultaneously describe the Jews as willful murderers and Christ as willing sacrifice. In answer to the question "Whether Christ was Slain by Another or by Himself," Aquinas writes:

> A thing may cause an effect in two ways: in the first instance by acting directly so as to produce the effect; and in this manner Christ's persecutors slew Him because they inflicted on Him what was a sufficient cause of death, and with the intention of slaying

> Him, and the effect followed, since death resulted from that cause. (2278; pt. 3, q. 47, art. 1)

As discussed above in chapter one, the Jews were not absolved of the crime of slaying Christ because they were unaware of his divinity: their ignorance "was, as it were, affected ignorance." But neither were they solely responsible for the Crucifixion, since, as Aquinas argues, it is also possible to bring about an effect in an indirect manner --

> that is, by not preventing it when [one] can do so; just as one person is said to drench another by not closing the window through which the shower is entering: and in this way Christ was the cause of His own Passion and death. For He could have prevented His Passion and death . . . . since Christ's soul did not repel the injury inflicted on His body, but willed his corporeal nature to succumb to such injury, He is said to have laid down His life, or to have died voluntarily. (2278; pt. 3, q. 47, art. 1)

Further, Aquinas implicates God the Father in the Crucifixion, explaining that he delivered his Son to the Passion in at least three ways:

> In the first way, because by His eternal will He preordained Christ's Passion for the deliverance of the human race . . . . Secondly, inasmuch as, by the infusion of charity, He inspired Him with the will to suffer for us . . . . Thirdly, by not shielding Him from the Passion, but abandoning Him to His persecutors . . . . (2280; pt. 3, q. 47, art. 3)

Thus, within the context of the Crucifixion, the Jews, Christ the Son, and God the Father are reputed to have acted entirely as free agents. Neither persecutor nor persecuted was a helpless pawn in the other's game.

This notion of double agency is also important in the context of the sacrament of the Mass. As discussed in the previous chapter, the heretical Lollards maintained that the priest's character is important to the successful celebration of the Mass; by placing too much emphasis on the agency of the celebrant, they were in danger of reducing the sacrament to formula instead of miracle. In his *Doctrinale*, Thomas Netter dismisses the Lollards' argument, contending that Christ's voluntary participation in the sacrament effectively overrules all human factors:

> I was therefore moved to recite here, in accordance with Christian law, that which has been written on the subject of man's worthiness belonging to God. Because in no way is man able to be (or I say) *worthy* to be saved, for salvation comes from God while worthiness comes from merit -- but worthiness should only be said to [come] from God. How is it that a man cannot be an intermediary obtaining assistance from God in the

> consecration of the Sacrament unless it is because of the people's 'worthiness,' or the 'worthiness' of the priest, because prayer will not bring [transubstantiation] forth if God does not accept the merit of those who have prayed? This is false and heretical. What do you possess that you have not received? Therefore nothing comes from your own merit, but has been received from God. Whence, IF GOD CROWNS YOU AFTER YOUR LABOURS, he does not crown your merits, though he certainly does crown you, as the Psalmist says, *in mercy and in compassion* . . . . Behold, God does crown you, but not your merits. He crowns in mercy and compassion; therefore he crowns only and purely as his gift; and because it is not on account of your merit, it is therefore on account of grace.[21]

Because Christ's own participation in the Mass is the deciding factor determining the efficacy or non-efficacy of the words spoken by the priest during consecration, the celebrant's exact repetition of turns, gestures, and elevations becomes much less important, as does his agency. In the end, Christ decides whether or not a particular celebration deserves his attendance, and he controls the unfolding of events in the sacramental scene.

Thus, the Host desecration in the *Play of the Sacrament*, as both historical remembrance and repetition and as ahistorical ritual, expands to include or changes completely into a masochistic fantasy as the Host begins to bleed and the Jews lose their initial sadistic agency. This movement, too, remembers and repeats the moment of transition from the old law, in which God chose his people and rejected the Gentiles, to the new, in which Christ generates a two-party contract between saviour and saved. Christ's voluntary subjection to the old institution generates a new law at the same time as it contravenes and oversteps (or, to put it less harshly, "fulfills") the conditions that made it possible in the first place, and so sacrifice becomes sacrament. Finally, the newly established law imposes itself upon the contract, and the parties who freely entered into agreement are now irrevocably bound by the law they have generated. In order to be saved, the individual must participate in sacramental ritual and in *imitatio Christi* (perhaps even to the degree of becoming a martyr for the faith) while, in order to save, Christ must remain wounded until the term of the contract expires.

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[21] Hoc ergo recitare duxi pro regula christianae locutionis de *dignitate* hominis penes Deum: quia nullo modo potest homo esse, vel dici dignus salute, quae ex Deo est, *dignitate*, quae est ex meritis, sed sola dignitate Dei vocantis. Quomodo ergo non est homini medium ad impetrandum a Deo adjutorium in confectione Sacramenti, nisi ex dignitate populi, vel ex dignitate hujusmodi Sacerdotis, quia oratio non proderit, nisi Deus acceptet meritum sic orantis? Falsum est, haereticum est. Quid habes, quod non acceperis? Nihil ergo est tui meriti, sed ab illo accepti. Unde, SI CORONAT TE DEUS POST LABORES, non tua merita, sed facta utique sua coronat; sicut Psalmista dicit: *in misericordia, & miserationibus* . . . . Ecce *coronat* Deus, sed *non merita tua*. Coronat autem nonnisi in misericordia, & miserationibus; ergo sola, & pura dona sua coronat: & quia non merita tua, ideo ex gratia. ("De Sacramentorum Ministro" 2: 83)

3. "The Sadist refused": Christ's Agency as Central and Revolutionary

In medieval theological, literary, and dramatic interpretations of the Crucifixion, Christ as masochist and the Jews as sadists often exist side by side and are even represented as complementary. The Jews are depicted as willing and eager participants in the Passion in order to justify their condemnation and their invalidation as God's chosen people; Christ is, simultaneously, depicted as a willing and eager sacrifice in order to reconcile his apparent impotence with his necessary omnipotence. Yet, while sadistic and masochistic fantasies are dependent upon one another and may even clash allegorically as they do in Artaud's *Les Cenci*, they are in practice incompatible, as Deleuze points out. Artaud represents the relationship between Beatrice and Cenci "as a matter of elemental dynamics" (Goodall, "Artaud's Revision" 121); father and daughter are presented as equal but opposing forces caught up in the strange alchemy of some savage god (122). In similar manner, medieval depictions of the Crucifixion, of Host desecrations, and of ritual murders often represent the Jews' sadism as essential. However, as an elemental force, their human sadism can never be coequal with Christ's divine masochism. At the Crucifixion and within the sacrament, the savage god himself makes up the second term of the dynamic equation, throwing it out of balance, weighting it in the masochist's favour.

In *Croxton*, the Jews initially appear to have found a perfect, helpless victim when they purchase and persecute the Host -- but this is not the case at all. The Host aggressively attaches itself to Jonathas, its persecutor, will not be removed, and therefore instigates and necessitates its own second Crucifixion; the masochist then assumes control of what was supposed to be an exclusively sadistic scenario, and manages to take it further. The Crucifixion is followed by a stylization of those events of the Passion -- the Burial, the Harrowing, and the Resurrection -- which the Jews would rather forget, and in these stylizations, the victim's pain and bleeding becomes so relentless that it horrifies even the sadistic torturer. At this point, the Jew becomes not a sadist, but a constructed dominatrix, or, as Deleuze describes it in *Sacher-Masoch*, a mere incarnation of the element of inflicting pain, wounding without intention and therefore "without realizing it as subject" (38; see above, 250). The scenario becomes entirely masochistic, with the Host acting as both agent and victim. Beyond the initial stabbing, there is no torture, only self-sacrifice as the masochistic fantasy takes over and the Host takes centre stage. The Host / masochist fulfills the conditions of its / his contract by demonstrating its / his continued or reiterable vulnerability. Further, Christ frustrates the Jews' attempts to demonstrate their ability to persecute him -- "Thow woldyst preve thy powre me to oppresse" (773), the bleeding image accuses Jonathas -- by displaying his own much more disruptive ability to be persecuted.

In a sense, the Jews as Oriental other are out-othered by the Host, and this perhaps suggests yet another reason for *Croxton*'s Spanish setting. As a heretic, the Lollard is an internal, abject threat and a revolutionary force; as a Spanish Jew, however, the Lollard is something external, something very old, an object that is itself perhaps open to infection. Because of its "early centuries of Muslim domination and the Christian reconquest that began almost as soon as the Moorish invasion ended," Spain in fifteenth-century Europe was "the main point of convergence between medieval Judaism, Christianity, and Islam" (Cohen 103). As demonstrated by Erna Paris, it boasted significant Jewish and Muslim populations and, before the ascension of Isabella to the crown of Castile in 1474, enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for official (if not always popular) religious tolerance. Fifteenth-century Spain seems an appropriate setting for *Croxton*'s masochistic desecration scenario, since it at once satisfies the Christian need for persecution, and therefore identity as *imitatio Christi*, and the Christian need to revolutionize despite its dominant status in Europe.

Following the example of Christ's martyrdom, these two needs go hand in hand. According to Raymond Lull and Raymond Martini, the "mere existence of flourishing non-Christian communities posed a threat to the faith of individual Christians as they traveled about the world" (Cohen 205). By trading with and travelling to both Christian and heathen lands, Aristorius the merchant, who Judas-like sells the Host to Jonathas, puts himself in considerable physical and spiritual danger. Yet at the same time, because of this danger, he and other Christians, priests, bishops, even religious objects such as images and Hosts, are afforded the rare opportunity of making a return to the moment of Christ's paradigmatic sacrifice. Medieval Jews were considered throw-backs and anachronisms who stopped developing and evolving at the moment of the Crucifixion, and therefore, apparently, felt the need to repeat the event endlessly. Though fervently denounced, their alleged sadistic collective disposition conjured titillating masochistic scenarios for contemplation by Christians, if not often (or ever) for their direct participation. The fantasy was that of controlling a situation apparently out of one's control, of revealing the sadistic scene to follow the agenda of a revolutionary, subversive other. Therefore the violence that the Jews inflict upon the Host in *Croxton* pales in comparison to the amount it apparently desires.

4. The Problem of the Host Miracle

The Jews' disruptive, sadistic treatment of the Host (as bread, as the literal body and blood of Christ) also pales in comparison to its visible, literal, masochistic transformation into the same, leaving the spectator in yet another ideological quandary. The Host responds to the Jews' desecration on a physical level: it responds to stab wounds, boiling oil, and intense heat by bleeding just as copiously as Christ was said to have done at the Crucifixion and was still believed to do, though glorified, in heaven. In good Oriental form, it reads and presents itself as a hieroglyph, as an opaque signifier. The Host disrupts and even contradicts its own ordinary, ritual contextualization and purification -- its identity as both sign and medium of Christian community, salvation, and eventual resurrection -- in order to expose and therefore prove its literal and horrible physical substance. It is like the plague victim who dies suddenly, having exhibited no external signs of infection though diseased to the core.

On one level, the Host responds to the Jews literally because, as they have demonstrated, this is the only type of signification that they understand. On another level, it responds to the Jews literally because, paradoxically, this is the only way to demonstrate the spiritual truth of transubstantiation. In its ordinary, properly contextualized form, the Host signifies its actual substance through established convention, and so communicates, to use C.S. Pierce's terms, as a symbol would.[22] There is nothing in the bread's appearance to suggest that it is body; there is nothing in the sign itself to connect it to its substance. For this reason, in *Croxton* and in other Host miracles, the Host is made to signify in (apparently) less abstract ways. When it bleeds, it behaves more like an index, a sign causally connected with its object. Just as smoke indicates fire and a knocking at the door suggests the presence of someone outside, blood suggests the presence of body or flesh in its general vicinity. The index therefore supposedly relies less upon convention than does the symbol, since it relates to its object through some kind of physical contiguity. Less abstract still is Pierce's icon, which presents its signified (or in the case of the Host, substance) mainly through similarity. Photographs and statues are good examples of icons, as are the images of Christ on the cross or of bleeding children that were sometimes reported to emerge from desecrated Hosts.

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[22] For a short discussion of Pierce's distinction between symbol, index, and icon, see Elam 21-27.

As Umberto Eco points out, "Similitude is produced and must be learned," (*Semiotics* 200) and so the icon is actually no closer to its referent than is the symbol. The choice of pertinent elements in the recognition of similarity is culturally stipulated: Eco cites the example of saccharin's presumed resemblance to sugar, which is judged on taste rather than appearance (194-95). Similarity is therefore not "natural;" it "does not concern the relationship between the image and its object, but that between the image and a previously culturalized content" (204). That being said, the similarity of medieval religious icons to their culturalized objects, Christ among them, was accepted almost without exception. Lollards of course argued that statues of Christ in no way resembled him, and insisted that such "dead stones and rotten stocks" were imperfect images and dangerous idols (Aston 152). They considered other elements -- sentience, for example[23] -- to be more pertinent in the assessment of similarity. However, for Catholic writers, visual appearance was extremely important, to the point of taking precedence over substance itself. Thomas Pecock, answering Lollard objections to images and icons, writes:

> Crist ordeyned in the newe lawe visible sacramentis to be take and vsid as seable rememoratijf signes of Crist, and of his passioun and deeth, and of his holi lijf . . . . If and whanne it is leeful and expedient forto haue and vse eny seable rememoratijf signes being lasse lijk to the thingis signified, it is leeful and expedient forto make, haue, and vse signes being more like to the same thingis signified. Forwhi the likenes of a signe to his significat, (that is to seie, to the thing signified bi him,) wole helpe the signe forto signifie and forto make remembraunce the bettir upon the thing signified; but so it is, that ymagis graued, coruun, or or zut [cast] ben more lijk to Crist and to his passioun, than ben the sacramentis whiche Crist ordeyned. (163; pt. 2, ch. 5)

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[23] Lollards argued that Christians should spend less time honouring wooden images of Christ and more time honouring "the true meek poor man that is a quick image of God." Acts of charity, they conclude, are true acts of worship; Christians waste their efforts when they clothe and visit "dead images that neither thirsteth nor hungereth nor feeleth any coldness neither suffereth disease, for they may not feel nor see nor hear nor speak nor look nor help any man of any disease as the holy prophets witnesseth." "And so who that trusteth on them worshipping them with worship that only pertaineth to God he maketh to him false and alien gods and breaketh the commandment of God" ("bonus tractatus de decem mandatis," BL Harl. 2398, 82ᵛ; qtd. in Aston 155).

In Pecock's opinion, the only thing that could be more similar to Christ than the carved and painted image was "a quyk man . . . sett in a pley to be hangid nakid on a cros and to be in semyng woundid and scourgid" (221; pt. 2, ch. 12).

In the *Play of the Sacrament*, the Host glories in its terrifying substance, its physical nature as sign, as it moves from symbol to index to icon, becoming, paradoxically, both more literal and more transparent. The accidents of bread disappear completely once the Host transforms into the image of the bleeding child: nothing is left behind but the flesh, which was also present before, though hidden. The Host no longer stands for body or acts as body, but *is* body, and visually approximates body. The distance between sign and object appears to decrease as the reading subject's need for and understanding of cultural convention also decreases. The icon lessens the Jews' doubts concerning the miracle of transubstantiation at the same time as it lessens the need for their newly acquired faith. *Beati qui non viderunt, et crediderunt* -- blessed are those who did not see and still believed.

Benedicta Ward refers to such Eucharistic transformations as "counter-miracles," since "they break through the miraculous surface of illusion to a representation of the substance that lies behind the unchanged appearance" of the Host (15). In the ordinary, sanctioned Mass, unappreciated miracles occurred on a daily basis. The substance of the Host regularly transformed into body, yet remained invisible and therefore beyond logical human analysis. Augustine, posed with the question of how exactly God manifested himself in the sacrament, answered: "A mystery of faith can be profitably believed; it cannot be profitably examined" (trans. in Rubin, *Corpus Christi* 22).[24] Centuries later but on same subject, the Eucharist, Hugh of St. Victor would write: "Here is marvel indeed . . . . Why do you start up with your logic, dialectician? What do you think of this, sophist? Why are you seeking arguments? That would be to sprinkle dust on the stars. Your logic does not reach so high" (trans. in Ward 14).[25]

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[24] Rubin cites Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* as the source of this quotation (4 D. 2, col. 1096).

The import, of course, is that while it is possible to know some things about God through human reason, it is always better (if in the end impossible, as discussed above in chapter two) to know them through simple faith. According to Aquinas, faith is not only more certain in sacred matters than is reason, it "is a virtue which reflects a right relation to God" (Colish 136). In the sanctioned Mass, the faithful celebrant, participant, or spectator raises his mind through an act of will "into a realm which the intellect cannot chart . . . making the mind cling to the unknown God with a firm adhesion" (128; see above, ch. 2, 146). In contrast, in the Host miracle, the unknown God descends into the realm of the intellect, and the body of Christ is subjected to human senses and to human judgement. The miracle of the Eucharist is reduced, if not, as Ward suggests, completely inverted, when the Host transforms into flesh, as is the ordinary yet miraculous daily celebration of the Mass. When a Host cult developed in Wilsnack, Germany in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, theologians expressed concern that the bleeding Hosts venerated by this cult would be regarded as special or unusually miraculous, "even though the sacrament [was] to be found in every church" (Zika 56). More dangerous still was the possibility that lay believers might doubt the "ordinary" sacramental miracle entirely, and therefore "suspect the true body of Christ to be found only in such wonder-working hosts and not in others" (56).

The Host miracle then, although it purports to affirm the central miracle of transubstantiation, instead diminishes and even deconstructs it. By revealing the hidden substance of the bread, the Host produces faith by eliminating the need for faith, and answers the Jews' literal reading of the Host -- as bread, as a body to be sadistically tortured -- with a literal reading of its own. The Host miracle then uses a literal representation of the literal essence of the Host in order to demonstrate the falsity of literal reading (at least with regard to the sacrament). If, as Kubiak writes, empirical reality in the Mass "is presented as an illusion that conceals truth" (49), then the Host miracle, like theatre, embraces illusion as truth, or reduces truth to the level of empirical reality. As Kubiak argues, "the Church's profound intuitive grasp of this oppositional identity between faith and illusion . . . forced it to repulse the drama;" "Theatre's truth could simply never be thought in the logic of faith" (49). Yet the Host miracle presents the Mass as an instance of theatre. And in turn -- to make things more convoluted still -- the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* presents a particular Host Miracle through the medium of theatre.

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[25] From *Speculum de mysteriis Ecclesiae* (see *PL* 177: 362).

5. The Problem of Theatre: "in signe and not in dede"

The process is a complicated one. The *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* associates drama with the grossly literal and the fleshly, and condemns the playing of miracles as a degradation of the spiritual truths embodied by Christ and in his works:

> siche miraclis pleyinge reversith Crist. Firste in taking to pley that that he toke into most ernest. The secound in taking to miraclis of oure fleyss, of oure lustis, and of oure five wittis that that God tooc to the bringing in of his bitter deth and to teching of penaunse doinge, and to fleyinge of feding of oure wittis and to mortifying of hem. (p. 94, ll. 57-62)

As discussed above in chapter one, theatre is "a verre goinge bacward fro dedis of the spirit to onely signes don after lustis of the fleysh that ben agenus alle the deedis of Crist" (p. 109, ll. 534-36), and so is a judaization. Worse still, although it purports to affirm the central tenets of the Christian religion, the theatre presents those tenets to an audience as empty illusion. The very existence of hell is therefore challenged by its representation: "many men wenen that ther is no helle of everelastinge peine, but that God doth but thretith us, not to do it in dede, as ben pleyinge of miraclis in signe and not in dede" (p. 100, ll. 255-58). As Kubiak suggests, dramatic representation calls the truth of transubstantiation into question since the Mass could be read as or confused with an instance of theatre. In turn, the Host miracle, which degrades the Mass by reducing it to the literal, fleshly, and therefore to the theatrical, is itself challenged when represented on the stage.

Any miracle in the theatre is of course illusion, a product of stage effects. When Jonathas stabs the Host in its middle, the actor representing him, unable to depend upon divine intervention in the play, prepares a mechanical simulation of the miracle and the Host bleeds. *Croxton*'s stage directions do not specify how exactly this is brought about, but Continental sources suggest that a small bladder of blood was concealed in the centre of the Host, or in the table upon which it is placed. In the French play of *La Sainte Hostie*, stage directions indicate that "through the use of '*secrets*' ('hidden places'), [a eucharistic] wafer, when struck with a knife, would spurt a quantity of blood into the air, as though it were, in the quaint imagery of the eyewitness, 'a pissing child'" (Gatton 83). Jonathas' subsequent "miraculous" dismemberment would have been achieved through the use of an artificial limb. Various body parts were often and, it seems, quite skillfully constructed for use in the theatre: in Mondane in 1580, Thomas Mellurin senior and junior were charged with the making of "several limbs that look like the limbs of people killed in . . . battle with the semblance of blood" for the *Mystery of the great Judgement of God* (Meredith and Tailby 105).

The appearance of the wounded child from the oven is undoubtedly a more complicated effect. Critics have generally assumed that the role of Christ is played by a boy actor (Homan, "Devotional Themes" 334, Nichols 125), but the rather peculiar wording of the stage direction at 712 suggests otherwise. After Jasdon has stopped the oven with clay, the direction reads: "*Here the owyn must ryve asunder and blede owt at þe cranys, and an image appere owt with woundys bledying.*" The wounded child is specifically referred to as an *image*, which suggests that he is represented by something rather than by someone -- by a prop rather than by an actor. Kurath and Kuhn's *Middle English Dictionary* lists eight possible definitions for the term "image," the most common being: "[a] piece of statuary, effigy, figure." Of the seven remaining definitions of the word, at least four emphasize the role human sense plays in the perception of the image, while two of these specifically associate it with deception: "a deceitful appearance, an apparition . . . a faint or imperfect likeness." Thomas Pecock in his *Repressor* refers to religious icons almost exclusively by this term, as do Lollards in their condemnations of the same. It seems likely therefore that the wounded child is being marked or distinguished as particularly artificial when it is referred to as an image.

Christ then could have been represented by a small statue or doll. It seems that neither was uncommon on the medieval stage: they were likely used to represent human souls after death, as well as Christ at the Conception and, some think, at his Ascension (Anderson 132-33, 151-52). It is also possible that the wounded child was represented by a puppet, since there is some evidence from the Continent that puppet-like mannequins were used alongside of live actors. Mellurin Senior and his son were charged with the construction of "an image looking like Antichrist which by skill they shall make move and alter its lips as a sign it is speaking" for the above-mentioned *Mystery of the great Judgement of God* (Meredith and Tailby 105). Unfortunately, we are not told how Antichrist is to be made to move and speak, only that he must; this itself is interesting, however, since images (dolls and statues) are generally silent and immobile on the English stage and are moved from place to place by angels or devils.

They need not have been -- the technology needed to animate them and to make them appear quite life-like certainly existed. Clockwork automata, introduced into the Western courtly tradition from the Islamic East, were immensely popular on the Continent in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The best and most famous examples were to be found at the castle of Hesdin in Artois. Michael Camille, in his book, *The Gothic Idol*, cites a contemporary account of the spectacle at Hesdin written by the Duke of Burgundy in 1432:

> And at the entrance of the said gallery there is a machine for wetting ladies when they step on it, and a mirror in which one sees many deceptions, and he made also at the entrance to

> the said gallery an 'engien' which, when its knobs are touched, strikes in the face those who are underneath and covers them with black or white . . . . Next to the said room there is a wooden hermit that speaks to the people who come into that room . . . . Item, there is a personage of wood that appears above the bench in the middle of the gallery and fools people and speaks by a trick and cries out on behalf of *Monsieur le Duc* that everyone should go out of the gallery. (trans. in Camille 248)

The mechanical skill involved here is impressive, as is the fact that, as Camille points out, "these *engiens* appear as examples of artifice whose sole function was to be enjoyed as mischievous duplicity" (248).

It is possible that the image of the wounded child in *Croxton* may be animated by similar clockworks. The stage directions are teasingly suggestive: we are told that the entire oven splits apart (*Here the owyn must ryve asunder*), that it must bleed *owt at þe cranys*, and that an image must somehow emerge from this (apparently self-) dismantling stage prop; finally, in response to the prayers of the bishop, the image must revert back into bread (*Here shall þe image change agayn into brede*, 825 s.d.). Given the elaborate automata described in the Duke of Burgundy's account, the Host's / oven's transformations do not seem beyond the capabilities of medieval mechanics, nor does this possible use of clockworks lack precedent in Continental or English drama. At Dieppe, France, mechanical puppets were used in an annual play commemorating the raising of the English siege on 14 August 1443:

> a religious and dramatic ceremony was celebrated in this town in the Church of St. Jacques every year on 15 August . . . . Priests and laymen played their parts in it assisted by a large number of mechanical figures moved by springs (*mues par des ressorts*) which were made to perform veritable marvels so as to represent (*figurer*) in a sort of apotheosis . . . the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. (Meredith and Tailby 115)

In Barcelona in 1453, the construction and use of a mechanical dove is recorded:

> In addition it is agreed and understood that the said Johan Çalom is to make or have made a dove with its mechanism (*una coloma ab son exercici*) which is to issue from the mouth of God the Father in the float of the Annunciation and descend with its wings extended (*ab les ales steses*) until it reaches Mary. And it is to emit certain rays of light or fire which are to do no damage when it is before Mary. And afterwards it shall return to God, 'flapping' its wings (*fahent exercici de les dites ales*). (119)

Meanwhile in England, the York Mercers' pageant wagon was equipped with similar mechanical marvels. Aside from its ascension machinery, the wagon boasted "ix smaler Aungels payntid rede to renne aboute in þe heuen" (Johnston and Rogerson 55-56). These small angels seem to have been animated by a pulley system, since "A lang small corde" was required "to gerre þe Aungels renne aboute" (56).

The use of such machinery, although apparently widespread, was not unproblematic or uncontroversial. It was popularly believed that images could be animated through magic or necromancy, as the account of the Roman Temple of Peace, widely circulated and therefore very familiar to a medieval audience,[26] effectively demonstrates. The following version of the story is found in the Chester Nativity, Play 6:

> Wee reade in cronicles expresse:
> somtyme in Rome a temple was
> made of soe greate ryches
> that wonder was witterlye.
> For all thinges in hit, leeve you mee,
> was silver, gould, and rych perlye;
> thryd parte the worlde, as read wee,
> that temple was worthye.
>
> Of eych province, that booke mynde mase [makes mention of],
> ther goddes image sett there was;
> and eych on abowt his necke has
> a silver bell hanginge,
> and on his brest written also
> the landes name and godes too.
> And sett was alsoe in middest of tho
> god of Rome, right as a kinge.
>
> Abowt the house alsoe mevinge there
> a man on horse -- stoode men to steare --
> and in his hand hee bare a spere,
> all pure dispituouslye [without pity].
> That horse and man was made of brasse;
> torninge abowt that image was.
> Save certayne preystes ther might non passe
> for devylls phantasie.

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[26] See Lumiansky and Mills 2: 94, ll. 573-635n.

But when that any lande with battell
was readye Rome for to assayle,
the godes [image] withowten fayle
of that land range his bell
and torned his face dispituouslye
to god of Rome, as reade I,
in tokeninge that there were readye
to feyghtinge freshe and fell.

The image alsoe above standinge,
when the bell beneath begane to ringe,
torned him all sharpely, shewinge
towarde that lande his spere.
And when they see this tokeninge,
Rome ordayned withowt tareinge
an oste to keepe there comminge,
longe or they came there.

And on this manere sothlye,
by arte of neagromancye,
all the world witterlye
to Rome were made to lowt. (572-615)

Albertus Magnus was reputed to have "made an automaton of a lovely woman who could speak until his zealous pupil Thomas Aquinas destroyed it as a work of the devil," while Roger Bacon was said to have constructed a brazen head capable of making oracular prophecies (Camille 249). The latter is the subject of Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* of 1589-92. In this play, the head -- which magically speaks, shoots forth lightning, and finally breaks into pieces -- is represented on the stage by some kind of mechanical prop.

Not surprisingly, contemporary churchmen considered the use and enjoyment of automata (magical or theatrical) to be highly suspect. As Camille writes:

> automata were . . . placed in the category of abhorrent demonic objects . . . along with other artificially created objects of fantasy and pleasure. According to the Nuremberg Chronicle of 1398, images like those that greeted visitors at the castle of Hesdin were 'turning mechanisms which perform strange gestures come directly from the devil.' (248)

The Church's main objection to automata was that their machine-driven movements approximated life without being life, or worse, like theatre more generally, approximated divine miracles without in any way being miraculous:

> automata were not seen as miracles but as tricks of knowledge, working by duplicity to hide their real workings. As such, the mechanical image is the opposite of a miracle, which is a revelation of truth. Like art, or what in fact we call 'illusionism,' it seeks to efface its own construction. In that sense it is in the image-not-made-by-human-hands tradition, which also seeks to deny its manufacture. (249)

The problem with the automaton is that it seeks to conceal its own falsity. In so doing, it places "new emphasis upon the power of the artificer as a creator, not of nature (like God), but against nature" (249). In short, automata were considered no better than idols, while those who created them or allowed themselves to be fascinated by them were denounced as idolaters (250).

A clockwork Christ child emerging from the oven would then seem to contradict the very Host miracle it represents through its mechanical movements. Miracle is reduced to magic or mechanics in the theatre in the same way that spiritual truth is laid physically bare in the event it dramatizes. Clockworks are not, strictly speaking, necessary for this contradiction to come into effect: if Christ is represented by a simple doll or statue, one is still faced with the problem of a Host, whose accidents are those of bread but whose essence is that of body, being represented by an image whose accidents appear to be those of body (specifically of Christ's body) but whose essence is not even real human flesh. Again, if Christ is represented by a living, breathing actor, his "transformation" from the Host into the Christ child is a product of stage effects, of deception and of simulation. Unlike the Host, which is Christ although it does not appear to be, the actor appears to be Christ although he is not.

In *Simulations*, Baudrillard wonders what the consequences might be "if God himself can be simulated, that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest to his existence" (10) -- his miracles, his incarnated form. Images of Christ, as they become more perfect and so more skillfully efface their own constructedness, have the potential to reveal that they refer to or conceal absolutely nothing at all: that they are images without an original object and so are nothing more than empty simulacra. According to Baudrillard, this horrible potential to replace and so to erase the referent, contained in all images, explains the iconoclast's (and so the Lollard's) holy rage to destroy them:

> they sensed [the] omnipotence of simulacra, [the] facility they have of effacing God from the consciousness of men, and the overwhelming, destructive truth which they suggest: that ultimately there has never been any God, that only the simulacrum exists, indeed, that God himself has only ever been his own simulacrum. (8)

God had as a result to remain a "pure and intelligible Idea" and nothing more (8). He could only ever be read or thought of spiritually -- never literally -- just as certain texts of the Bible had always to be understood allegorically and were never to be read at the level of their simplest meanings.

At the end of the previous chapter, the *Croxton* Jews' tendency to read literally and to abjure metaphor was discussed in relation to the text of Matthew 18.9 -- "if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away" -- and Baudrillard's seduction scenario in *Fatal Strategies* (see above, ch. 3, 246-47). However, this text and scenario could be read in at least two additional ways. Christ's assertion and command, "This is my body and blood; do this in remembrance of me," could be considered equivalent to the woman's question, "What part of me seduced you the most?" The Jews' response, their literal remembrance of the Crucifixion (the only possible response they can make given their particular reading disorder) then would correspond to the man's naïve answer, "Your eyes." Christ responds in turn by abjuring all metaphor: he does not surrender his body under the appearance of bread but under the appearance of actual body and blood. The spiritual truth of transubstantiation is thus expressed on a physical level, in order that those who understand only body might finally comprehend. In this way the Jews, who have demanded to know whether or not the Host is the body and blood of Christ, are rewarded on the exact level of their demand. This is of course terrible, and they go mad. Again, the subject is caught in a trap of his own making, and is dragged down to his annihilation by the fatal object. The Oriental Jew, the Oriental plague itself, is infected, sickens, and dies, and in the process reveals himself / itself to be a straw man and an empty threat. The real revolutionary in the above scenario is Christ himself in the form of the Host. As Jonathas complains, he / it acts completely irrationally: "Yt bledyth as yt were woode" (483). By reacting to the Jews' actions as though they are literal torments, the Host engages in the very behaviour its existence denounces, and therefore reads in exactly the same manner as does the woman, the Jew, and the Lollard.

In turn, the sacrament, by allowing itself to be expressed through the medium of and as theatre, also participates in that which it rejects and condemns. Here the woman's question could perhaps correspond to the theatre's query, "What is the Host?" to which the sacrament answers, "The miracle of the body and blood of Jesus Christ." The theatre then responds to this statement in the only way it can -- by abjuring all miracle in favour of mechanical simulation. Theatrics express the "truth" of transubstantiation while undermining its basic principles; thus, Christ and the theatre succeed only in destroying that upon which they depend. Their revelations (revolutions) are revealed to be as circular and self-destructing as are those of Beatrice and Francesco in Artaud's *Les Cenci*.

6. Artaud, the (Un)Holy Trinity, the Mass, and the Church

There is not exactly an ambivalence, but a strange fluctuation in Artaud's attitudes toward Christ and the Mass which suggests that he (at least intuitively) appreciated the powerful yet failed revolutionary nature or quality of each. During his brief conversion, Artaud regarded Christ as a high revolutionary, and the rite he established as essential theatre; before and after, he regarded both as mere tools of God the Father, the Holy Ghost, and the established spiritual bourgeoisie. Significantly, prior to, during, and following his momentary acceptance of Catholicism, Artaud remained suspicious of the institution and rites of the Catholic Church. He realized that Christ's revolution could subsequently and unscrupulously be exploited, or, more sinister still, could, from the very beginning, have been engineered to support an obscene spiritual regime.

In a letter to André Breton dated 14 September 1937, Artaud describes and explains his own particular, post-conversion understanding of Christianity's "holy" Trinity. He does not simply compare but assimilates God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit with the Hindu trinity of Brahma (first creator), Shiva (the dissolver), and Vishnu (the preserver). Within this / these triad(s), the Son-Shiva, the destroyer, is in constant battle with the Father-Brahma, "the First Consciousness of the horrible Force of Nature which creates Being and causes the misery of all Beings" (trans. Weaver 406),[27] as well as with the Spirit-Vishnu, that force which preserves Being and prevents its destruction. Artaud writes:

> in reality the Son-Shiva is AGAINST that Creation-Manifestation of the Father which is PRESERVED by the Holy Ghost. For the Son-Shiva is also Force, but it is the Force of Transmutation, therefore of the *destruction* of forms, it is the eternal movement *in* and *through* forms, without ever resting in any. (405)

The Son-Shiva "is therefore the very force of the Absolute" (405-06),[28] is "the negative force of Nature, the one that saw the evil of living and summoned the Good of Dying" (407). His incarnation did not purify or redeem the body; on the contrary, "he chose to pass through a body in order to teach us to destroy bodies, and to put away attachment to bodies" (407).[29] Yet this rejection of the body does not necessitate its physical destruction, for "Only idiots would take the point of all this to be killing, murder, or Suicide" (408).[30] Thus, while there have been men foolish enough to misunderstand the significance of the Crucifixion and to die as copy-cat victims and as martyrs in *imitatio Christi*, or alternately, to kill in the name of religion, they "were a mere caricature" of the authentic force of dissolution (407).[31] True initiates of the Son-Shiva who genuinely seek the absolute are not required themselves to destroy or to be destroyed but are merely (and impossibly) required at all times to side "with the Son against the Father, but ABOVE ALL against the Holy Ghost" (406).[32] In order to do this they must adopt a method or strategy of reading completely foreign and frightening to human beings, in which the void, the absolute, pure negation is constantly meditated upon, referred to, and evoked:

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[27] "la Première Prise de conscience de la Force horrible de la Nature qui crée l'Etre, et fait le malheur de tous les Etres" ("A André Breton, 14 septembre," *OC* 7: 287).

[28]
> en réalité le Fils-Shiva est CONTRE la Création-Manifestation du Père, MAINTENUE par le Saint-Esprit. Car le Fils-Shiva c'est aussi la Force, mais c'est la Force de Transmutation, donc de *destruction* des formes, c'est l'éternel passage *dans* et *à travers* les formes, sans s'arrêter jamais sur aucune, c'est donc la force même de l'Absolu. (*OC* 7: 287)

[29] "Il était la force négative de la Nature, celle qui a vu le mal de vivre et appelle le Bien de Mourir. Et s'il a voulu passer par un corps c'était pour nous apprendre à détruire les corps, et à repousser l'attachement des corps" (*OC* 7: 289).

[30] "Seuls des imbéciles comprendraient qu'il s'agit dans tout cela de tuerie, d'assassinat ou de Suicide . . ." (*OC* 7: 290).

> The point, since we are alive, is to live by denying life, to look at things from the place where they rise and not from the place where they lie flat on the ground, to look at them from the place where they are going to disappear and not from the place where they are established in reality. (408)[33]

According to Artaud, this is no small task. The Holy Ghost-Vishnu, "which protects bodies and makes us believe in the fact of living . . .[and] which denies the Absolute" (407),[34] is a powerful force, and one more attractive to the vast majority of men and women. Notions or ideals of creation, genesis, and regeneration are kinder, gentler, if entirely deceptive, points of reference from which to view the universe and man's role within it. They are also particularly female and thus sexual, carrying with them all the powers of physical seduction such notions entail, and so Artaud plays off the similarity of the Hindi word for dove ("YONA") and that for vagina

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[31] "cet Homme [Jésus-christ] en qui le second Temps, le Fils Shiva de la Manifestation Eternelle s'était Incarné était un Initié redoutable que les Hommes d'après ont caricaturé" (*OC* 7: 289).

[32] "Ceux qui cherchent l'absolu sont avec le Fils, contre le Père, mais SURTOUT contre le Saint-Esprit" (*OC* 7: 287).

[33] "il s'agit, puisque nous sommes en vie, de vivre en refusant la vie, de regarder les choses du côté où elles montent et non de celui où elles s'aplatissent sur le sol, de les regarder de celui où elles vont disparaître et non de celui où elles s'installent dans la réalité" (*OC* 7: 290).

[34] "qui conserve les corps et qui nous fait croire au fait de vivre . . . [et] qui nie l'Absolu" (*OC* 7: 289).

("YONI," 406; *OC* 7: 287). In *The New Revelations of Being*, he writes that the Spirit-Vishnu's sole desire is to give over the world to the sexuality of women and to the supremacy of the mother. In the particular world cycle in which we (and Artaud) find ourselves, the Holy Ghost has achieved just this, has privileged the force of creation over that of destruction, and the world has as a result fallen under "the Left, the Republic and Democracy" (trans. Hamilton and Corti 73).[35] As Artaud states in his letter to Breton, "the Holy Ghost is the established Bourgeois . . . [and] the 3rd force of God Vishnu is conservative" (trans. Weaver 408).

It is for this reason that Artaud refers to the second, destructive force of God, the Son-Shiva, as the "eternal Revolutionary" (408)[36] and as "Christ of the catacombs."[37] Although at present rejected by the godhead and therefore compelled to participate in a kind of divine guerrilla warfare, the Son-Shiva was not always spurned and forced underground in this manner: there was a time in the past in which Christ the destroyer was in perfect equilibrium with his counterpart the Spirit creator. As Artaud writes in his letter to Breton, in this "golden age" (trans. Weaver 407; "âge d'or," *OC* 7: 289) the "Eternal Triad which manifested . . . Creatures [destroyed] them in order to purify them by Son-Shiva and then [regenerated] them by the preserving force of the Holy Ghost-Vishnu" (406).[38] However, at some point the Spirit-Vishnu, or the Female, took precedence over Son-Shiva, or the Male, and all balance and symmetry in the universe was destroyed. As a result, according to Artaud, the time approaches "when this force of life [Spirit-

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[35] "Gauche, République et Démocratie" (*Les Nouvelles Révélations de l'Etre* in *OC* 7: 159).

[36] "le Saint-Esprit est le Bourgeois installé et le christ le Révolutionnaire à perpétuité . . . . la 3^{me} force-Dieu Vichnou est conservatrice" (*OC* 7: 290-91).

[37] "christ des catacombes" ("Lettre à Ann Mason," *OC* 7: 281).

[38] "la Triade Eternelle qui a manifesté les Etres, les [a] detruit[es] pour les sublimer par le Fils-Shiva et les [a] recompos[ées] ensuite par la force conservatrice du Saint-Esprit-Vichnou" (*OC* 7: 288).

Vishnu] must die"[39] and creation must give way to final destruction (407). Son-Shiva will bring about the end of the current world-cycle in which the woman is dominant and will usher in a time in which man's absolute supremacy is effectively re-established and in which "everything to do with sexuality will be burnt" (*New Revelations*, trans. Hamilton and Corti 74).[40] Obviously, a complete and final redemption of man and of time itself was not achieved with the Incarnation and Crucifixion, since a third age of the world still remains to be initiated by God and experienced by man.

In order to bring about this third age, a new "saviour" is required, a new incarnation of the power of Christ the destroyer. This new saviour, "a Furious One" ("Letter to Breton," trans. Weaver 407), "A VIRGIN" (*New Revelations*, trans. Hamilton and Corti 72), "A FOOL WHO IS ALSO A WISE MAN AND WHO HIMSELF SEES HE IS WISE AND MAD" (75), and above all else, "a Tortured Man" (81),[41] will be raised up by the power of Son-Shiva against the Spirit. He will "*overthrow* ALL Churches and send the rite of the Initiates back under the ground," will condemn the present Pope to death, and in this way, eliminate the idolatry of contemporary Catholicism ("Letter to Breton," trans. Weaver 407).[42] More importantly, he will combat the Antichrist who is to be raised up by the power of the Holy Ghost-Vishnu. Thus all four figures will engage in a battle of incredible proportion and unimaginable consequence: "It will be war," Artaud writes, "all this will be the war of the Son against the Holy Ghost and the war of the christ against the antichrist" (409). In the end, because the "force of life is exhausted, the antichrist, who represents life and attachment to the forms of life, will be destroyed," as will Spirit-Vishnu (409). However, these two combatants will not be defeated before they themselves cause "the destruction of many things and many people" (409)[43] – including their opponent, the second force and Son of God.

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[39] "où cette force de vie doit mourir" (*OC* 7: 289).

[40] "tout ce qui est de la sexualité sera brûlé" (*OC* 7: 159).

[41] "l'Enragé" (*OC* 7: 290); "UNE VIERGE" (*OC* 7: 158); "UN FOU QUI EST AUSSI UN SAGE ET QUI LUI-MÊME SE VOIT SAGE ET FOU" (*OC* 7: 161); "un Torturé" (*OC* 7: 166).

[42] "le christ pour punir son Eglise va susciter un Enragé qui *rasera* TOUTES les Eglises et fera rentrer sous la terre le rite des Initiés.

Le Pape actuel sera condamné à mort par cet Enragé . . . . (*OC* 7: 289).

For in establishing the third age, Son-Shiva will again sacrifice himself for the liberation of humankind, and will die in the course of his battle with the Holy Ghost-Vishnu. His death will be voluntary, and will be a necessary consequence of the battle in which these two forces of God "destroy each other to permit the disappearance of what is" (407).[44] Because "Man can do nothing against God, only God himself can do anything against God " (409), Son-Shiva's participation in a successful rebellion against God is indispensable. Yet, because Son-Shiva, as God, battles with God and therefore with an equal, he must himself be destroyed. As Artaud writes, "The 3 forces of God which were in equilibrium are going to destroy each other, and in order to do this they will make war on each other and devour each other" (409).[45]

God the Father or Brahma, Son-Shiva the destroyer, and the Holy Ghost-Vishnu will all be annihilated, and as a result, "the world will be levelled by Right . . . [and] the Left will fall once more under the Supremacy of the Right . . . EVERYWHERE" (*New Revelations*, trans. Hamilton and Corti 73).[46] This is because the three members of the Godhead are merely particular manifestations of or intermediaries between man and the Force of Nature; their destruction will not therefore affect this penultimate force, except perhaps to make its influence on the lives of men and women that much stronger and more obviously oppressive. For unlike the rules of men or even of gods, Nature's laws cannot be broken, and humankind's participation in its particular brand of justice is never innocent or voluntary:

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[43] Ce sera la guerre, tout cela sera la guerre du Fils contre le Saint-Esprit et du christ contre l'ante-christ . . . . Or commme la force de vie est à bout de course l'ante-christ qui représentera la vie et l'attachement aux formes de la vie, sera détruit non sans . . . faire détruire beaucoup de choses et beaucoup de gens. (*OC* 7: 292)

[44] "se détruire pour permettre la disparition de ce qui est" (*OC* 7: 290).

[45] "l'Homme ne peut rien contre Dieu, seul Dieu lui-même peut quelque chose contre Dieu . . . . Les 3 forces-Dieu qui s'équilibraient vont se détruire, et pour se détruire entrer en guerre l'une contre l'autre et se dévorer" (*OC* 7: 292).

[46] "Le monde sera égalisé par la Droite . . . Et . . . la Gauche va retomber sous la Suprématie de la Droite . . . PARTOUT" (*OC* 7: 159).

> The Force of *Nature* is the Law, and the Law is the *Nature of Things*, which in any case makes the Law, whether one accepts it or denies it. And it is We, too, who have made the Law and who are, whether we like it or not, the custodians and accomplices of the Law.
>
> IT IS THUS and THERE IS nothing TO BE DONE ABOUT IT.
>
> To deny it is to deny ourselves. Until one understands this, one cannot understand life and the disorder of life or *remedy* the evil of life. ("Letter to Breton," trans. Weaver 406)

Ultimately, the Force of Nature is all there is, and so "One cannot rebel against the Law" (406).[47] This is especially true after the destruction of the godhead, when all inauthentic, deceptive, seductive codes and rules have been rejected by man and therefore no longer remain to frighten, amuse, or distract him.

Thus the sky can and will still fall on our heads, and the destructive force of the Son-Shiva, his anarchic poetry and "sinister laugh"(407), teaches and reveals that to us first of all. Initially, during his years of conversion to (albeit a considerably heterodox and even heretical) Catholicism, Artaud considered this negative, destructive, and therefore revelatory aspect of the Son-Shiva's power to be an important, even the only possible, ally in humankind's war with the absent overseer, God the Father, and the "horrible force of nature"[48] of which he is the first consciousness. Over time, however, Artaud began to suspect that Christ's apparent allegiance with men and women was nothing but a fraud, and even worse, was a complete double-cross working instead to the benefit of the entire (un)holy Trinity and the Law of Nature from which they arose. As early as 1945, in a letter to Henri Parisot, Artaud retracted his profession of faith, writing, "I was fool enough to say I had accepted conversion to Jesus Christ, while in very fact Christ is that which I have always most of all abominated . . ." (trans. Rattray 82).[49] In 1947, in his "Letter against the Kabbala," Artaud denounced "the father, the son, the holy ghost (the father, mother and son)" as "3 incorrigibly filthy accomplices" (trans. Rattray 114),[50] and, further, denied the revolutionary potential of the cross and therefore of the Crucifixion, dismissing both as mere tools of and means of maintaining the status quo. According to Artaud:

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[47] La Force de la *Nature* est la Loi, et cette Loi est la *Nature des choses* qui de toute façon fait la Loi, qu'on l'accepte ou qu'on le nie. Et c'est Nous, aussi, qui avons fait la Loi et sommes que nous le veuillons ou non les responsables et les complices de la Loi.
C'EST AINSI et IL N'Y a Rien A FAIRE.
Le nier c'est nous nier nous-même. Tant qu'on n'a pas compris cela, on ne peut comprendre la vie et le désordre de la vie et *remédier* au mal de la vie.
On ne peut se rebeller contre la Loi . . . . (*OC* 7: 287-88)

[48] "la Force horrible de la Nature" (*OC* 7: 287).

> The number 3
> is just as idiotic as the sign of the cross.
> The pair of them were well-designed to go together;
> as well as the threadbare sophistry of the trinity of the father, the son and the innumerable ghost. (120)[51]

Artaud had come to believe that, for all intents and purposes, Jesus Christ is God the Father, exhibiting both creative and destructive tendencies within his character. "Jesus-christ is the Father and the Son at the same time," he writes, "and there is nothing other than him, and he [Jesus-christ] is his double Faculty of being and of not being, of being outside and within [being]."[52]

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[49] "j'ai eu l'imbécillité de dire que je m'étais converti à Jésus-christ alors que le christ est ce que j'ai toujours le plus abominé . . ." ("Lettre à Henri Parisot, 7 septembre 1945," *OC* 9: 63).

[50] "les 3 indécrottables compères du père du fils du saint-esprit, du père, de la mère, du fils" (*Lettre contre la Cabbale* 12).

[51]
> Le chiffre 3
> est aussi imbécile que le signe de la croix.
> Ils sont bien faits tous deux pour aller ensemble
> aussi la trinité famélique sophistique du père du fils et de l'innumérable esprit. (22-23).

[52] "Jésus-christ est le Père et le Fils en même temps et il n'y en a pas d'autre que lui et c'est sa double Faculté d'être et de ne pas être, d'être le dehors et le dedans" ("Cahiers de Rodez, Mai-juin 1945," *OC* 16: 44).

Artaud suspects that the destructive aspect of Christ's nature, which formerly seemed to be so revolutionary, actually functions as a basic support of the Father or condition of his very being. He therefore describes Jesus as "the Intelligence of the Father," explaining, "this means that the Father is his own non-being and that by rising up from the cross through the medium of the Virgin . . . he [Christ] created the privation of God so that God might be, but not [the privation] of being itself, which is the privation of God."[53] The destruction offered in the person of Jesus Christ justifies the creation insisted upon by God the Father and so represents "a certain false abyss . . . that was never the empty centre of a law except for the imbecilic copulator: Jesus-christ -- prince of the copulation of the shadows of the uncreated, principle of the impure, of envy and jealousy."[54]

Not only does Christ negatively support creation (and thus sexuality, liminality, and perversion), but he also negatively gives rise to and purifies the Holy Spirit through his Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. According to Artaud,

> The Holy Virgin will be the Mother of the Holy-Spirit or the Holy-Spirit will not be.
> This means that the Holy-Spirit is not able to exist if Jesus-Christ does not carry it as well, and that the spirit that before existing has not carried the cross of being in Jesus-christ will never be able to be spirit.[55]

The intention behind Christ's Incarnation was never to purify the human body, but to separate and distinguish it from spirit finally and completely, and thus to purify the Holy Trinity:

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[53] "Jésus-christ est l'Intelligence du Père . . . . Cela veut dire que le Père est son propre non-être et que par montée de croix à travers la Vierge . . . il a créé la privation de Dieu pour Dieu être, mais pas d'être en soi, c'est la privation de Dieu" ("Cahiers de Rodez, Février-avril 1945," *OC* 15: 50).

[54] "un certain gouffre faux . . . qui ne fut jamais le creux d'une loi sauf pour le copulateur imbécile: Jésus-christ -- prince de la copulation des ténèbres de l'incréé, principe de l'immonde, de l'envie et de la jalousie" (*OC* 16: 275).

[55] "La Sainte Vierge sera la Mère du Saint-Esprit ou le Saint-Esprit ne sera pas.
Cela veut dire que le Saint-Esprit ne peut pas être si Jésus-christ ne le porte pas aussi et que l'esprit qui avant d'être n'a pas porté la croix de l'être en Jésus-christ ne pourra jamais être esprit" (*OC* 15: 143).

> I, the spirit, God said, I am pure, and you, the body of this man, you are Satan and are nothing, and it is not the body of man that has become pure but me, the spirit of God, who always maintained it and descended into it and directed it for eternity, and he who desires the pure is me, the spirit, who returned in this obscene body and designs it as a fluid body since obscene, and not as a material body.[56]

The Resurrection completes this purification of the spirit and condemnation of "fluid," liminal, inconstant human flesh as Christ appears in "a false body of death wickedly returned from its tomb in a spirit of idiotic disillusionment."[57] Christ's suffering and return from the grave sets an important precedent, even establishes a condition of transcendence and ascendance for all those who adhere to the Father's dichotomy of body and spirit. Assuming the voice of Lucifer (God the Father's proper designation and title),[58] Artaud tells the fleshly individual that he, as pure spirit, desires

> that you, child [a child to be bewitched], you maintain things while evil is done, that you suffer it in your being and body, and that I, the spirit your Father, that I be, with the Virgin, the Saints, and Jesus-christ, maintained in Paradise. After, you will die and I will allow you to participate in my heaven because you are not God, but it is I, Lucifer the spirit, who is God. -- And you [your ego or self], resistant to Evil and sin, will return to me and you will contemplate and adore me throughout eternity.[59]

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[56] Moi, l'esprit, a dit Dieu, je suis pur, et toi, le corps de cet homme, tu es Satan et du foutre, et ce n'est pas le corps de l'homme qui est devenu pur mais c'est moi, l'esprit de Dieu, qui l'ai toujours maintenu et suis descendu en lui et le dirige de l'éternité et celui qui veut le pur c'est moi, l'esprit, qui suis revenu dans ce corps obscène et qui le désigne en corps fluidique comme obscène et non en corps physique. (*OC* 16: 175)

[57] "un faux corps de mort mal retourné de sa tombe dans un esprit d'illusionné idiot" (*OC* 16: 274).

[58] "Lucifer never existed, but it is God the Father who was Lucifer . . ." ("Lucifer n'a jamais existé, mais c'est Dieu le Père qui était Lucifer . . ." *OC* 16: 22).

[59] Voilà ce que je veux faire, a dit Lucifer . . . que toi, enfant [un enfant pour l'envoûter], tu maintiennes les choses pendant que le mal sera fait, que tu le souffres sur toi en être et corps, et que moi, l'esprit ton Père, je sois, avec la Vierge, les Saints et Jésus-christ, maintenu en Paradis. Ensuite tu mourras et je te donnerai de participer à mon ciel parce que tu n'es pas Dieu, mais c'est moi, Lucifer l'esprit, qui suis Dieu. -- Et Ton moi de résistance au Mal et au péché me reviendra et tu me contempleras et m'adoreras pendant l'éternité. (*OC* 15: 144)

As in "Workman's Hand & Monkey Hand," God the Father promises humankind that it is possible for men and women to pass from body into spirit -- not in this life, but certainly in the next. Yet, to achieve this transcendence they must first willingly suffer the indignities of being (of crucifixion) that Christ suffered for them at Golgotha, or rather, as Artaud suggests, suffer these same indignities in the place of "Jesus-christ." As Goodall points out, Artaud's notion of the Crucifixion appears very similar to that of Docetist Gnostics, who "held so strongly to the doctrine of the vile body that [they] rejected the idea that Christ could have actually been embodied" (*Gnostic Drama* 203). In the Docetist account of the Crucifixion, "Christ tricks his persecutors, evading them by leaving a mortal man in his likeness to suffer in his stead whilst he watches in triumph over the process" (203); thus, Artaud exclaims, "It was *I*, and not Jesus-christ, who was crucified at Golgotha, for wanting nothing to do with god or *his* christ because I am a man and god and *his* christ are nothing but ideas . . ." (trans. in Goodall 203).[60] Within Artaud's scenario, "Christ and his God are the *lâches* whose vampiric profit from the travail of embodied being is the quintessential crime, and the figure of the crucified becomes that of incarnate humanity in general" (Goodall 203). Men and women are tricked (by the paradigm of Christ's supposed descent into being, sacrifice, and return from the grave) into believing that their bodily suffering will somehow spiritually redeem them. Sadly, in the end all they succeed in doing is purifying the spirit, extracting and distancing it more completely from the body, and thus rendering themselves more unworthy and obscene.

Because the sacrament of the Eucharist remembers Christ's Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Ascension and therefore constantly renews for and reminds the Christian believer of Christ's paradigmatic sacrifice, Artaud abhors the Mass. Even during his brief conversion, when he regarded the basic rite to be of a "High revolutionary Magic," Artaud categorically rejected the sacrament as celebrated in the Catholic Church. In his letter to Breton, he writes: "Man, by eating the flesh of a Man who *chose* to sacrifice his own life, eats his own disappearance and affirms his contempt for the duration of things, for *their bodily structure*, and for their effigies" (trans. Weaver 408).[61] However, out of this sacred rite, Artaud complains, "the priest-Men, those Eternal established Bourgeois, have made the Mass which produces Nausea" (408).[62]

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[60] "C'est *moi*, et non Jésus-christ, qui ai été crucifié au Golgotha, et j'ai l'été pour n'avoir pas voulu de dieu ni de son christ parce que je suis un homme et que dieu et *son* christ ne sont que des idées . . ." (qtd. in Goodall 203).

After Artaud's conversion back from the faith, his hostility to the sacrament of the Eucharist grew even stronger. In "To Have Done with the Judgment of God," he concludes:

> There is no human act,
> on the internal erotic level,
> more pernicious than the descent
> of the so-called jesus-christ
> onto the altars. (trans. Weaver 562)[63]

As far as Artaud is concerned, the sacrament of the Eucharist remembers two completely inauthentic events: the Passion of course, but also the Last Supper (la Cène), the scene of Christ's supposedly "revolutionary" resignification of Old Testament sacrifice. Christ's establishment of a "New Law" and sacrament was in reality nothing more than a fraudulent insurrection, a staged bourgeois rebellion held in the service of the Trinity and its fellow conspirators, the priests. In describing Artaud's vision of the Last Supper as a "nightmare nevertheless rendered banal,"[64]

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[61] "Le rite institué par le christ est un rite de Haute Magie révolutionnaire . . . . l'Homme, en mangeant la chair d'un Homme qui a *voulu* se sacrifier à mort, mange sa propre disparition et affirme son mépris de la durée des choses, de *leur plastique*, et de leurs effigies" (*OC* 7: 291).

[62] "les prêtres-Hommes ces Eternels Bourgeois installés ont fait la Messe qui donne la Nausée" (*OC* 7: 291).

[63]
> Il n'y a pas d'acte humain
> qui, sur le plan érotique interne,
> soit plus pernicieux que la descente
> du soi-disant Jésus-christ
> sur les autels. ("Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu," *OC* 13: 86)

[64] "Cauchemar pourtant banalisé" (261).

Françoise Bonardel evokes a rather "homey" communal scene depicting Christ's return to the Trinity after his instigation of the Mass and its fulfillment in the Crucifixion. Bonardel envisions "a family smiling at the new arrival (without doubt a prodigal son) who, opening the door, discovers them already at table."[65]

"With these 'decent fellows,'" Bonardel continues, "everything is said and yet not said in the final smile, if final."[66] The Father and Holy Ghost (or Mother) appear surprisingly unconcerned by the arrival of their "prodigal" Son and therefore, even if they have not slaughtered the fatted calf, seem to be expecting Christ for dinner. Thus for all the apparent strife, they remain a close family, taking this important meal together, smiling at one another almost conspiratorially. Still, a climate of palpable malaise, "established by the trinity family,"[67] envelops all those seated at table. Bonardel writes: "one understands the viscosity [of this uneasiness] as soon as one ceases to cling to what can logically be expressed about this closed triangle: familial closure, latent xenophobia, a suspicious benevolence always ready to turn malicious."[68] The human observer can never form part of this closed family unit and must take care. He or she will always remain the object of its benevolence and malice, or perhaps, malice because benevolence. Artaud tells us: "I saw Jesus-christ break my head with the cross of the Bohemians that he seized one day in my head with the pity and rage of his heart for me."[69]

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[65] "une famille souriant à l'arrivant (un fils sans doute prodigue) qui, ouvrant la porte, la découvre attablée" (261).

[66] "Chez ces « braves gens », tout est dit et plus encore non dit dans la pointe extrême du sourire fin, si fin . . ." (261).

[67] "instauré par la famille trinitaire" (261).

[68] "on saisit toute la viscosité [de cette malaise] sitôt qu'on cesse de s'attacher uniquement à ce qui, de cet enfermement triangulaire, peut être logiquement exprimé: clôture familiale, xénophobie latente, bienveillance soupçonneuse toujours prête à devenir fielleuse" (261).

[69] "je verrai Jésus-christ me casser la tête avec la croix des Bohémiens qu'il saisit un jour dans ma tête avec la pitié et la rage de son coeur pour moi" (*OC* 16: 19).

In response, the Church offers its rituals and laws as security in the face of (even as protection from) the unsettling anarchy which is the (un)Holy Trinity. It therefore, in a sense, feeds off the instability generated by the conflict, real or imagined, between the Father, Spirit, and Son. Again, Artaud offers an allegory of this elemental struggle and its exploitation at the hands of the Church as legal institution in *Les Cenci*. Here the tyrannical, sadistic Francesco is systematically associated with destiny and fate, with Lucifer and therefore God, while the masochistic Beatrice is identified with Christ (or Antichrist) -- just before her execution, she proclaims, "With my death, life itself perishes" (58; 4.3.).[70] The conflict here is circular, as is the conflict between the Father-Brahma and the Son-Shiva in Artaud's vision of the final apocalypse; here too, the law survives the destruction initiated and produced in and through this elemental battle, and is even strangely empowered by the self-consuming energy of Beatrice and Cenci's struggle. As Camillo informs Giacomo, in the event of a revolutionary conflict between Cenci and his children, "old Cenci's fortune, his treasure, castles and estates must inevitably revert to the papcy [sic] over the heads of his family" (36; 2.2).[71] It is for this reason, Camillo suggests, that the Pope has encouraged Cenci to disinherit his children and has refused to intervene on Giacomo's behalf (35-36; *OC* 4: 225; 2.2). It is perhaps also for this reason that the Pope has chosen to fine Cenci a third of his possessions for a murder he commits before the opening of the play. Cenci is incensed by the Pope's demand, but, it seems, is more angry and upset at the possibility that those treasures that remain him may eventually be seized and consumed by his offspring. "The third of my possessions," he exclaims in irritation; "And what is left is to serve to keep my children in pampered luxury" (18; 1.1).[72] This prospect, aggravated by his reduced circumstances, cuts Cenci to the quick and prompts him to act against the law and against reason. "I shall lop some branches off my flourishing family," he resolves (18; 1.1.).[73]

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[70] "C'est la vie qui périt en moi" (*Les Cenci* in *OC* 4: 269).

[71] "la fortune du vieux Cenci, ses trésors, ses châteaux, ses terres doivent, par-dessus la tête de sa famille, retourner à la papauté" (*OC* 4: 225).

[72] "Le tiers de mes possessions! Et ce qu'il en reste pour dorloter les jours de ma progéniture" (*OC* 4: 192).

The Church, through its prescription against familial sexual relations, also likely provokes Cenci's decision to force an incestuous relationship upon his daughter.[74] As Artaud makes evident in *Art and Death*, that which prohibits also makes possible and desirable that which is prohibited; thus he describes Abelard the virgin's final seduction of, or by, Héloïse as follows:

> A final pressure restrains me, freezes me. I feel between my thighs the Church stopping me, complaining, will it paralyze me? Am I going to withdraw? No, no, I push aside the final barrier. St. Francis of Assisi, who was guarding my sex, steps aside. St. Bridget unclenches my teeth. St. Augustine undoes my belt. St. Catherine of Siena puts God to sleep. ("Clear Abelard," trans. Weaver 134)[75]

Cenci maintains that he is not to blame for his trespasses, but rather God is, and the Church. "Repentance is in the hands of God," he proclaims; "It is for Him to regret my act" (47; 4.1.). "Why has he created me father of a being whom I desire utterly?" (47; 4.1.),[76] he asks, never once considering that he desires Beatrice precisely because he is her father. Cenci goes off in search of her, seeks her when she is concealed from his frustrated, lustful gaze. "Where is she hiding, eh?"

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[73] "J'élaguerai dans mon abondante famille" (*OC* 4: 192).

[74] Goodall discusses the effect of prohibitive law on desire with reference to Lewis' *The Monk* in *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama* (87).

[75]
> Une dernière pression me retient, me congèle. Je sens entre mes cuisses l'Eglise m'arrêter, se plaindre, me paralysera-t-elle? Vais-je me retirer? Non, non, j'écarte la dernière muraille. Saint François d'Assise, qui me gardait le sexe, s'écarte. Sainte Brigitte m'ouvre les dents. Saint Augustin me délie la ceinture. Sainte Catherine de Sienne endort Dieu. ("Le clair Abélard," *L'Art et la Mort* in *OC* 1: 136)

[76] "Le repentir est dans la main de Dieu. C'est à lui à regretter mon acte. Pourquoi m'a-t-il rendu père d'un être que tout m'invite à désirer?" (*OC* 4: 250).

he asks Lucretia; "Where is she hiding? Desire, fury, love, I do not know . . . but I burn. I hunger for her . . . . Go find her for me" (47; 4.1.).[77]

Thus at every turn and from every angle, the Church seems in Artaud's view to desire and encourage the (limited and contained) destruction of the family, human or divine. Orsino the priest confesses to the audience in an aside, "My one desire is to give this wretched family the means to destroy each other" (37; 2.2.),[78] while Camillo reassures Giacomo, "An armed uprising [against Cenci] would by no means displease me if I were persuaded of its limited nature" (35-36; 2.2.).[79] The Church encourages anarchy or plague in order that "healing," or repression, might follow -- Dollimore's perverse dynamic. However, as Camillo acknowledges and Giacomo threatens, any benefit gained from chaos and disease carries with it a certain calculated risk of damage or loss. Camillo admits to Giacomo that the course of action he advocates against Cenci is dangerous, but, he insists, "it gives me no cause for heart-searching" (35; 2.2.).[80] In response, Giacomo admonishes him:

> For a priest of Jesus Christ you speak a very strange language. I doubt whether the anarchy you recommend is so very desirable. Your Pope is like the sleeping man in the fable: each time he tosses and turns in his dreams, his priests translate his dream into action and provoke us into killing each other. Be careful! If I do as you suggest, my actions might turn into a kind of war against your own authority. (35; 2.2).[81]

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[77] "Où se cache-t-elle, dis? Où se cache-t-elle?
Désir, fureur, amour, je ne sais pas . . . mais je brûle. J'ai faim d'elle . . . . Va me la chercher" (*OC* 4: 249).

[78] "Je veux donner à cette race maudite les moyens de se dévorer" (*OC* 4: 227).

[79] "Une levée de boucliers dont je vois d'ici les limites n'est pas faite pour me gêner" (*OC* 4: 225).

[80] "elle n'est pas pour m'épouvanter" (*OC* 4: 224).

[81] Pour un prêtre de Jésus-Christ, tu parles un bien étrange langage. Je ne sais pas si l'anarchie est tellement à recommander. Ton pape est comme le dormeur de la fable: il bouge en rêve, et ce sont ses prêtres qui nous poussent à nous entre-tuer. Prends garde que ce que tu me conseilles de faire ne devienne une espèce de guerre contre ta propre autorité. (*OC* 4: 224)

7. Responding to the Other Allegorically: The Church in *Croxton*

When the Host in the *Play of the Sacrament* changes into the image of the wounded child, a Church authority, the bishop, steps onto the scene. By this time, it is impossible to say whether his authority is offered as a counterbalance to the disruptive, sadistic, theatrical behaviour of the Jews or to the disruptive, masochistic, theatrical behaviour of the Host. Jonathas, naïvely assuming the former, tells his fellow conspirators, "The bysshoppe wyll I goo fetche to se owr offens, / And onto hym shew owr lyfe, how þat we be gylty" (796-97): he intends to fetch the bishop so that the bishop might see evidence of the Jews' horrific crime displayed on the battered and bloodied body of their victim, Christ. When the bishop arrives, however, he is exclusively concerned with and by the disruptive appearance of the Host, and immediately attempts to restore it to its rightful, ritual form. He prays that Christ might "From thys rufull syght . . . reuerte" (817), following this prayer with requests for "grace," "marcy," forgiveness, and "peté" (820-23). When the Host finally does change back into the form of bread, the bishop is ecstatic:

> Oh thu largyfluent Lord, most of lyghtnesse,
>   Onto owre prayers thow hast applyed:
> Thu hast receyuyd them with grett swettnesse,
>   For all owr dredfull dedys þou hast not vs denyed. (826-29)

His words suggest that Christ could have chosen not to revert back into the form of the Host, could have "denied" the audience's or congregation's prayerful request. The bishop implies that Christ remains a potentially fatal object (like Baudrillard's woman, or the Jew), and so has only temporarily been persuaded, *seduced*, back into the realm of metaphor and sacramental ritual.

The Church then feeds off the instability not only of the Jew, but of Christ himself as Host -- and possibly even of the *Play of the Sacrament* as theatre. Once the Host has changed back into its correct form, the bishop declares his intention to return it to the church. He invites the others to join him in procession:

> Now wyll I take thys Holy Sacrament
>   With humble hart and gret devocion,
> And all we wyll gon with on consent
>   And beare yt to chyrche with solempne processyon:
>
> Now folow me, all and summe,
>   And all tho that bene here, both more and lesse.
> Thys holy song, *O sacrum Conuiuium*,
>   Lett vs syng all with grett swetnesse. (834-41)

Victor Scherb notes that the bishop here "seems to speak directly to the audience in a manner that involves them immediately in the devotional action of the play" (76). He argues that audience members participate vicariously in the procession, and that divisions in the social corpus Christi in both Spain and heresy-ridden England are thereby symbolically healed. Sister Nicholas Maltman suggests that the audience's participation in the procession could be even more direct. She wonders if the bishop's call for "all tho that bene here, both more and lesse" to sing might not address "more than the nine or ten actors who put on the play" (158). She writes: "Since the *O sacrum convivium* is an antiphon and since the antiphonaries were among the common textbooks out of which schoolboys learned to parse and construe, it is possible that some adults in the audience were able to sing along with the cast of actors" (158). The antiphon itself supports Scherb's argument that the procession symbolizes the return of unity to the Church as corpus Christi, since it makes reference to the glorification of the individual Christian and of the Church at Christ's return: "O sacred banquet in which Christ becomes our food, the memory of his passion is renewed, the soul is filled with grace and a pledge of future glory is given us" (trans. in Maltman 158).

Extending Maltman's argument, there seems no reason to restrict the audience's participation to the antiphon. The bishop's call for everyone present to sing appears no more all-inclusive than does his call for "all and summe" to follow in procession. The audience may then accompany the bishop to another playing area, just as the audience of the Digby *Conversion of St. Paul* accompanies the expositor character "Poeta" from station to station, from stage to stage.[82] In *Medieval Drama*, David Bevington suggests that the audience may move inside a church building for the remainder of the play: "The singing of *Te Deum* at the end suggests that this play may have been performed in conjunction with matins . . . . In terms of staging, then, the action may actually conclude inside the church with a full procession and the performance of religious ceremonies" (755). The actor playing the bishop "is presumably dressed in garments obtained from the church's wardrobe," while his props -- a baptismal font, among other miscellaneous objects -- are also, very likely, "furnished by the church" (275). The spectre of ecclesiastical authority and control, present in this particular theatrical production from the start, looms large at the play's conclusion as the Church reclaims its own. Theatre is finally replaced by ritual as the literal and fleshly becomes metaphorical and spiritual once again (if not once-and-for-all).

The Host miracle, caught in a trap of its own devising, is in danger of being dragged to annihilation by the fatal object, and so the Church steps in and, wielding the metaphor, restores the sacrament. Christ and the Jews suffer equally at the hands of the bishop: they demonstrate their power to seduce and to be seduced only to increase the Church's power and authority. In like manner, the theatre is only ever exploited to the Church's ends. The play is allowed a brief instance in which to seduce the audience, but must finally give way to religious ceremony in the form of a procession and an "actual" ecclesiastical service (Bevington 755).

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[82] *Poeta* addresses the audience as follows: "Fynally, of þis stacyon thus we mak a conclusyon. / Besechyng thys audyens to folow and succede / Wyth all your delygens þis generall processyon." His speech is followed by the stage direction, "*Finis istius stacionis et altera sequitur*" ("The end of that station, and another follows," ll. 155-57; 161 s.d.).

Christ in the form of the Host reduces himself to the level of an image or icon; the play reduces the miracle to the level of an image or icon as well. This reduction is exactly what the author of *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* objects to, and is exactly what Jean Baudrillard believes indicates that medieval iconolaters "were the most modern and adventurous minds" (*Simulations* 9).

Images were very important to Catholic worship, as Thomas Pecock demonstrates in his *Repressor*. They had the ability to instill in the average Christian an affection towards and belief in an absent God, in a spiritual truth, through their physical proximity to the believer:

> It is esier forto ymagyne a thing absent to be present in an other thing lijk therto, than withoute eny other thing lijk therto . . . . it folewith that it is coueitable to a man into the gendring or the contynuyng of such seid affeccioun to God and to seintis for to desire haue, and for to gete to him and haue vnto his visage or iȝen or mouth the touche of Cristis feet or of his mouth or of his hond or breste bi meene of the touche which the hond getith fro hem and vpon hem immediatli. (268, 271; pt. 2, ch. 20)

Until the thirteenth century, the Church only officially recognized icons in this capacity as remembrances -- of Christ, of Mary and the saints; it maintained that images "were fine as long as they were only channels that diverted attention away from the materiality of the signifier and pointed the viewer to its transcendental meaning" (Camille 204). However, after the thirteenth century, under the influence of the Eastern Church, the material of the signifier or icon became more opaque, and therefore the image became unstable (206). On occasion, transcendental meaning channelled down into the empty icon, which would as a result weep, sweat, or bleed. God revealed in this way the images he particularly favoured, encouraging men and women to visit these images and to show them special devotion (Pecock 188; pt. 2, ch. 8).

Images therefore simultaneously lifted the believer up into the realm of the spiritual and dragged the object of belief down into the realm of the physical. The icon was an empty shell which, potentially, could become a hieroglyph, could be filled by the truth it generally only ever represented. This potential was both seductive and frightening, and could be realized either by demons or by divinity. According to John Hus, the supposed miracle of the bleeding Hosts in Wilsnack was the work of the devil and was "a sign of increasing diabolical intervention in the world associated with the last days" (Zika 54). Simple Christians, because they were unable to distinguish between the divine and the demonic, had to place their trust in Church authorities, who would discriminate for them. The empty icon, like the lurking, invisible heretic, justified and necessitated the Church's power.

However, like the heretic, the icon -- or the *idol* -- could also be a threat to its authority. In *Implications of Literacy*, Brian Stock has demonstrated that Guibert of Nogent's hostility toward relic cults was never the triumph of reason over superstition it was presumed and reputed to be. Rather, Guibert recognized that these cults appropriated power from the Church hierarchy every time they sanctified religious objects (body parts, images) without official approval, and in this way undermined orthodox control of popular religious movements (244-51; see Moore, *Persecuting Society* 134). Charles Zika, discussing the Wilsnack bleeding Host cult, concludes that the Church's opposition to this particular movement when it "fully supported" "other analogous cults" (56), was in part a reaction to its popular origin and in part a reaction to the cult's ambivalence toward Church authorities. Zika writes that, in the course of the Church's struggle to have the cult invalidated and disbanded, the "establishment of a theologically educated clergy as the arbiters of the correct relationship between doctrine and practice emerged as a fundamental point at issue" (55).

The empty and unstable image was therefore the site at which Church authority could be justified or completely rejected -- or, perversely, could be justified because completely rejected. In the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, miracle is simulated through impressive stage effects; the audience marvels simultaneously at the wonders produced by God and those produced by Man. Nothing more is offered than an empty reflection of authentic miracle, and therefore the audience, like Baudrillard's iconolater, is "content to venerate God at one remove" (*Simulations* 9). However, if the play, as Bevington suggests, moves from a stage just outside of a church into an actual church building, the empty reflection appears to be replaced by the full and complete object previously reflected. The physical movement from street to church was a recognized gesture of, perhaps even a method of performing, spiritual sanctification: the bodies of child martyrs, supposedly crucified by Jews, were often carried to and displayed for a time in local churches, as were other wonder-working images and relics. The movement of the Host / wounded Christ child into the church is then appropriate in its dramatic context since the miracle must be sanctified and recognized by Church authority; however, if the church is an actual church in which the sacraments are celebrated, there is in this movement an added and equally appropriate sanctification of the play as empty theatrical representation. When the Church receives the theatre into its midst, it removes the audience from the realm of the signifier, elevates them to the realm of the signified, and in the process derives a little added authority for itself. The movement into a church building is a movement up and away from the illusory and fleshly to the actual, transparent and yet invisible, presence of Christ's flesh in the Host. What initially appeared to be more real than the sacrament -- the theatrical representation of the bleeding Host -- is finally replaced by what is more real than appearance, more real than empirical reality.

Yet, any movement up suggests, even necessitates, a corresponding movement down, just as the abject's movement out to become object makes possible its disruptive, perverse return. If the theatrical representation of a miracle is treated in exactly the same way as is an actual miracle -- carried to and sanctified in a church -- the theatrical representation becomes the miracle, and both are reduced to the level of simulacra. Further, if the Christian Church allows the theatre to enter its doors, it opens itself to the possibility of dramatic infection. In *Croxton*, the bishop who performs the sacrament of baptism on the Jews is almost certainly not even a real priest and therefore has no authority to baptize anyone anywhere, let alone in an actual Catholic church. The "bishop" merely mimics holy baptism in his gestures. As a result, the sacrament, that which appeared to fulfill the empty image of theatre, becomes theatre itself and is emptied of significance. Simulation enters and implicates the Church.

However, again, instability and emptiness can be manipulated to different ends. The instability of the Jew and of the Host encourages the confused believer to rely upon Church hierarchy for stability and reassurance, yet even the instability of the Church hierarchy itself, along with the sacraments it proffers, does not necessitate the institution's deconstruction. As Baudrillard argues with regard to religious images and icons, once medieval believers realized that "images concealed nothing at all, and that they were not images, such as the original model would have made them, but actually perfect simulacra forever radiant with their own fascination" (*Simulations* 8-9), they were faced with two options. They could respond as did the iconoclasts, destroying all those images which efface God and which evince the "death of the divine referential" (9). Alternately, they could hold tighter to "the idea of the apparition of God in the mirror of images," knowing that those images "no longer represented anything, and that they were purely a game," but "knowing also that it is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them" (9). The Church took a calculated risk every time it revealed what lay behind the image or mask, over the edge, beyond the wall, counting heavily on the individual's fear of anarchy and schizophrenia. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, the majority of believers so confronted approach the wall and back away, horrified, happy to fall under and to be marked again by the law of the signifier.

9. Artaud, the Perverse Dynamic, and the Anarchist Crowned

It is, admittedly, quite unlikely that the *Play of the Sacrament* intentionally destabilizes the sacrament and conflates it with theatre. The Jew and the Host are presented as fatal, seductive objects to be controlled and secured by the Church, and this to its own benefit, but the object's instability, although constructed, is difficult to contain. The object makes a perverse return and implicates the subject: the Jew reverts from sadist to dominatrix and participates as such in the masochistic Christian fantasy; the Host rejects the possibility of its literal interpretation by reading itself literally; and the Host miracle is simulated on stage with disturbing accuracy. As Dollimore notes, the institution can only strengthen its own position by weakening it simultaneously, by identifying, describing, and therefore evoking the seductive object which may at any time reveal itself to be abject. The dominant opens itself to infection, or stated more accurately, makes itself vulnerable to opportunistic diseases already within, by contrasting itself with the other. However, the danger to which the dominant exposes itself is minimal, since instability, even the instability of the institution itself, is "a force of repression much more than a force of liberation" (Dollimore 89). Allowing itself to be challenged, even insisting that it be challenged, the dominant, which has brute force on its side, usually comes out on top and stronger than ever in a skirmish with its other (90).

Hence the rather ambiguous attitude toward the Jew and the woman (as well as to Christ) evident in Artaud's writings. Robert Desnos' description (or prescription) of the Jew as a necessary, spreading cancer, working from within to subvert the dangerously powerful West, simply inverts anti-semitic discourse and so prompts repressive social mechanisms. Inverting a binary does not destroy it, and perhaps even justifies a more violent reaction against those who are unlucky enough (temporarily) to occupy the positive pole. Artaud's assertion, "if we think Negroes smell bad, we are ignorant of the fact that anywhere but in Europe it is we whites who 'smell bad'" (*TD* 9).[83] likely would succeed not in altering but affirming the racist's fear and hatred of the other. Artaud himself admits that the Oriental theatre, "the most beautiful manifestation of pure theater it has been our privilege to see [in Europe]," is "so well contrived to disconcert our Occidental conceptions of theater" that it may actually in a majority of cases cause its viewers to "deny it has any theatrical quality" at all (57).[84] Confronted by Eastern anarchy and metaphysical truth, the West retreats back into its fortress of psychology and words. The Orient then participates in by threatening the repressive structures of the Occident.

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[83] "*si nous pensons que les nègres sentent mauvais, nous ignorons que pour tout ce qui n'est pas l'Europe, c'est nous, blancs, qui sentons mauvais*" (*TD* 14).

However, the Orient can participate in repression in ways that are much more active and direct. The East's potential and capacity to oppress stems in part from its construction in and by the Occident, and so we see Desnos' inverted anti-semitism resurfacing in the vast Jewish conspiracies to which Artaud later imagined himself subject -- for example, he was convinced that "the *Action Française* [had] rescued him from being arrested by a Jewish-controlled French police force" in 1939 (Friedrich 288; Esslin 54, 101, 111). Artaud's irrational, disturbing hatred and fear of the Jews eventually extended even to the Cabbala, which he had for so long held in high regard. By 1947, he had identified Kafka, Judaism, and the Cabbala as the source of his (considerable) mental problems:

> My dear friend Jacques Prevel, I think I have taken about as much shit as I'm going to from Kafka, his arsoteric [sic] allegorical symbolism, as well as this Judaism of his, which contains, in the bud and on a small scale, every last one of those chicken-livered suckaprickadickadildoes that have never ceased giving me a pain in the ass for all these 10 years I have been hearing about them . . . . I doubt the world has ever known a more obnoxious crock of silly shit and sanious monkeyshines than the cock-and-ball stew known as the Kabbala, this larva coming out all over in an angry rash of the rejected angels of the mind. ("Letter Against the Kabbala," trans. Rattray 113)[85]

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[84] "ce spectacle [le Théâtre Balinais] [est] si bien fait pour dérouter nos conceptions occidentales du théâtre, que beaucoup lui dénieront toute qualité théâtrale alors qu'il est la plus belle manifestation de théâtre pur qu'il nous ait été donné de voir ici . . ." (87).

[85] Mon cher ami Jacques Prevel je commence à en avoir chié de Kafka, de son ésotérisme, de son symbolisme, de son allégoricisme et de son judaïsm, lequel contient en germe et en petit toutes les foutoukoutoupoutou potroneries qui n'ont cessé de m'emmerder depuis 10 années que j'en entends parler et qui vont cesser immédiatement de m'emmerder parce que je n'en entendrai plus jamais parler . . . . Je ne connais pas au monde de plus énorme pot pourri de sanieuses calembredaines, de puantes pitreries glandulaires et testiculaires que l'orchitisme phallique de la Cabbale; insurrection larvaire d'un psoriasis d'anges spirituels démis comme esprits. (*Lettre contre la Cabbale* 1, 2)

Even before the war, Artaud indulged his delusions of persecution by fantasizing about the elimination of millions of people he judged to be useless and, worse still, parasitic: "seven to eight million human beings should be exterminated; what is that to the three of four thousand million who inhabit the earth. Most human beings spend their life doing nothing, exploiting the life of others, taking hold of their consciousness . . ." (trans. in Friedrich 296, n. 27).[86] In 1943, Artaud dedicated his apocalyptic work, *Les Nouvelles Révélations de l'Etre* to the "man who was turning his own genocidal fantasies into reality, Adolf Hitler" (Friedrich 288).[87] Again, Artaud's attitude toward Hitler was ambiguous. Artaud claimed that the two had met in May of 1932 in the

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[86] "Il y aurait sept à huit cents millions d'êtres à anéantir, dit Artaud, qu'est-ce c'est sur trois ou quatre milliards qui vivent sur la terre. La plupart des êtres passent leur vie à ne rien faire, à pomper la vie d'autres êtres, s'emparer de leur conscience" ("Ivry, mercredi 6 août," Prevel 168).

[87] To Adolph Hitler
in memory of the
Romanische cafe in
Berlin one afternoon in
May of '32
and because I pray
God
give you the
grace to remember
all the wonders
by which HE
has GRATIFIED (RESUSCITATED)
YOUR HEART
this very day

Kudar dayro Zarish Ankkara
Thabi. (trans. Hirschman 105)

[A Adolf Hitler
en souvenir du Romanischès café à Berlin un après-midi de mai 1932
et parce que je prie DIEU
de vous donner la grâce de vous ressouvenir de toutes les merveilles dont IL vous a ce
jour-là GRATIFIÉ (RESSUSCITÉ)
LE COEUR
kudar dayro Tarish Ankhara
Thabi.] (*OC* 7: 430)

Romanisch Café in Berlin -- a meeting Stephen Barber describes as "just plausible" (51). Artaud's account of the meeting, however, is not: apparently Hitler at this time told Artaud of his future plans for the Continent; Artaud "retorted to Hitler that he was crazy to lead people by ideas rather than by actions, and a violent brawl ensued" (Barber 51). They did not fight, Artaud suggests, because they had conflicting goals but because they had conflicting methodologies. At times, it seems that Artaud regarded Hitler, the madman who dominated Europe while Artaud was confined to an insane asylum, as his alter ego or double. He also considered the German dictator an "other" to the Oriental Jew, whom Artaud by this point no longer deemed revolutionary but oppressive and therefore worthy of oppression.

The tyrant is for Artaud the flip side of the tyrannized, and vice versa; as a result, the distinction between the two terms often blurs in his writing. In "Here where I stand," Artaud not only relates but equates his own madness and impotence with the tyrant's total omnipotence, his aspiration to be a god:

> I am the master of things
> That it's *myself*
> who's made them and makes them
> and what I know *now*
> is that all things have come out by chance
> and that they fancy themselves able not to re-enter
> but there is another thing I know
> not hazily but lucidly
> and that's that things
>   *and beings*
> ineluctably obey the commandment of my breath
> and that any opposition, any detour, ends up in a
> frightening
>   *shock in return*
>   *for all I will.* (trans. Hirschman 205-06)[88]

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[88] je suis le maître des choses
que c'est *moi*
qui les ai faites et qui les fais
et ce que je sais *maintenant*
c'est que les choses sont toutes sorties au hasard
et qu'elles s'imaginent pouvoir ne pas rentrer
mais il y a une autre chose que je sais
non confusément mais fortement

God speaks and the earth trembles, and this is exactly the power Artaud craves and usurps for the protagonists of his theatre of cruelty. Artaud offers tyranny as another form of anarchic poetry, since the tyrant is as senseless and chaotic as any of the Marx Brothers and since his preferred medium of communication is penetrable human flesh. Although each of Artaud's heroes are despots in their own way, Heliogabalus is without a doubt the most successful of the bunch: a dictator who, "once on the throne, accepts no law," who makes "His own personal law . . . the law of all," and who therefore "reduces everyone to obedience," he prefers to act without explanation or justification, as any god should:

> Believing himself to be god, identifying himself with his god, he never commits the error of inventing a human law, an absurd and ridiculous human law through which he, as god, would speak. He obeys the divine law in which he has been initiated, and it must be acknowledged that apart from a few excesses here and there, a few pleasantries of no importance, Heliogabalus never abandoned the mystical point of view of a god incarnate, but a god who observes the millenary rite of god. ("from *Heliogabalus, or the Anarchist Crowned*," trans. Weaver 320).[89]

Unlike God the Father, Heliogabalus will not cede power to the law and so will not participate in the myth of its authority. As far as he (and so Artaud) is concerned, power does not operate

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c'est que les choses
et les êtres
obéissent inéluctablement au commandement de mon souffle
et qu'une résistance, un détour, n'aboutissent qu'à un
effroyable
choc en retour
de toute ma volonté. ("Là où j'en suis" 136-37).

[89] Héliogabale, une fois sur le trône, n'accepte aucune loi . . . . Sa propre loi personnelle sera . . . la loi de tous . . . . Il impose sa tyrannie . . . [et] met le monde à son pas . . . .
Se croyant dieu, s'identifiant avec son dieu, il ne commet jamais l'erreur d'inventer une loi humaine, une absurde et saugrenue loi humaine, par laquelle lui, dieu, parlerait. Il se conforme à la loi divine, à laquelle il a été initié, et il faut reconnaître qu'à part quelques excès ça et là, quelques plaisanteries sans importance, Héliogabale n'a jamais abandonné le point de vue mystique d'un dieu incarné, mais qui se conforme au rite millénaire de dieu. (*OC* 7: 118)

through or in conjunction with the law, but rather in opposition to it. Heliogabalus speaks and the earth trembles, but only because he speaks without reason or apology.

Nonetheless, like Jesus Christ, he will voluntarily subject his body to humiliation and oppression. Heliogabalus, Artaud writes, "dresses as a prostitute and sells himself for forty cents at the doors of Christian churches or the temples of Roman gods;" in so doing, "he is not simply pursuing the satisfaction of a vice, he is humiliating the Roman monarch" (324).[90] This inexplicable, voluntary debasement is yet another form of anarchic tyranny, or of tyrannical anarchy -- as Artaud points out, "Every tyrant is at bottom only an anarchist who has seized the crown" (320).[91] Heliogabalus, like the Marx Brothers, like Herod, and like Christ, resignifies language:

> He is calling weakness strength and theater reality. He is upsetting the received order, the ordinary ideas and notions of things. His is a thoroughgoing and dangerous anarchy, since he reveals himself to the eyes of all. In short, he risks his own skin. And that is the act of an anarchist of courage. (324)[92]

Like the bodies of Christ the victimized masochist and of Herod the sadistic victimizer, Heliogabalus' body ultimately reflects in its physical form the disruption and disintegration of the social corpus he has effected throughout his reign. He and his mother are overtaken by an angry crowd and are torn to pieces:

> There follows a scene from the butcher's stall, a disgusting blood bath, an ancient tableau of the slaughterhouse.
>
> Excrement mingles with blood, splashes along with blood on the swords that forage in the flesh of Heliogabalus and his mother . . . .
>
> 'To the sewer!' now howls the populace which has profited from the largesses of

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[90] "Lorsque Héliogabale s'habille en prostitué et qu'il se vend pour quarante sous à la porte des églises chrétiennes, des temples des dieux romains, il ne poursuit pas seulement la satisfaction d'un vice, mais il humilie le monarque romain" (*OC* 7: 124).

[91] "Tout tyran n'est au fond qu'un anarchiste qui a pris la couronne" (*OC* 7: 118).

[92] Il appelle la faiblesse: de la force, et le théâtre: de la réalité. Il bouscule l'ordre reçu, les idées, les notions ordinaires des choses. Il fait de l'anarchie minutieuse et dangereuse, puisqu'il se découvre aux yeux de tous. Il joue sa peau pour tout dire. Et cela est d'un anarchiste courageux. (*OC* 7: 124)

> Heliogabalus but which has digested them too well . . . .
> Satiated with blood and with the obscene sight of these two bodies -- naked, ravaged, and showing all their organs, even the most private -- the mob tries to stuff the body of Heliogabalus into the first sewer hole they come to. (333)[93]

With the death and dismemberment of Heliogabalus, another Roman regime begins. It will of necessity be tyrannical and anarchic; unfortunately, Artaud suggests, it will hide its tyranny and anarchy behind the law (as does God the Father), will distinguish itself from Heliogabalus' reign and label itself "civilized."

The threatening tyrant eventually necessitates his own suppression, and invites, after a fleeting moment of revolution, the re-establishment of tyranny in and through his threatening other -- whether that other is Occidental or Oriental. In the latter case, tyranny could be the product of the other's construction by "the same," as is Desnos' and Artaud's vision of the East, or it could be a product of the other's own symbolic system. As Herbert Blau writes in "The Myth of Ritual in the Marketplace of Signs," every semiotic system, Occidental or Oriental, carries with it inevitable human and social costs. A system other than our own may appear to be less conventional (and therefore, according to Artaud, preferable) until we investigate the exact nature and degree of its particular costs (315). Artaud, privileging the Balinese theatre, imports "Oriental" signs into the West as hieroglyphs. However, these signs are not hieroglyphs within their original system, are not opaque but transparent, and are, potentially, equally oppressive as our own. What we appropriate as revolutionary may instead be that which represses revolution. Discussing Brecht's essay on Chinese acting and his "quick appropriative instinct for a 'transportable piece of technique.’” Herbert Blau points out that the German director and playwright had an "equally quick aversion to what [that technique or sign] might represent" (325-26). The use value of the oppressive technique or sign, "Carried over through the exchange mechanisms of bourgeois culture," would be "in some measure already soiled" (326) when incorporated. The ideology of the sign and its place within its original system had carefully to be examined before it was assimilated. Otherwise, the Orient, in the process of deconstructing the Occident, could construct in its place a system equally stagnant and oppressive.

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[93] C'est ici une scène d'étal, une boucherie répugnante, un antique tableau d'abattoir.
Les excréments se mêlent au sang, giclent en même temps que le sang sur les glaives qui fourragent dans les chairs d'Héliogabale et de sa mère . . . .
« A l'égout », hurle maintenant la populace qui a profité des largesses d'Héliogabale, mais qui les a trop bien digérées . . . .
S'étant bien repue de sang et de la vue obscène de ces deux corps dénudés, ravagés, et qui montrent tous leurs organes, jusqu'aux plus secrets, la troupe essaie de faire passer le corps d'Héliogabale dans la première bouche d'égout rencontrée. (*OC* 7: 136)

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* offers a striking illustration of the repressive threat that the appropriated sign can pose to mere "toilet-paper revolutionaries" ("Manifesto for a Theatre that Failed," trans. Weaver 161).[94] The Jews confiscate the Host, transporting it from its original, Christian semiotic where it signifies transparently, into their own, where it definitely does not. The Host stalls at the level of the signifier, at the level of bread, and becomes an opaque hieroglyph; as such, it becomes the focus and medium of their particular revolutionary movement. In an act of incredible rebellion and blasphemy, the Jews stab the Host and are, momentarily, successfully seditious. However, the Host has been appropriated from a deeply oppressive system -- it is, to use Blau's term, already very soiled -- and so the rebellion is extremely short-lived. Given a point of entry, the ideology behind the sign participates in the revolution, but with its own agenda. The Host offers itself as a different kind of hieroglyph and all too literally tears the Jews and their semantics to pieces.

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[94] "révolutionnaires au papier de fiente" ("Manifeste pour un théâtre avorté," *OC* 2: 24).

10. Christ's Revolutionary Passion: Strategies of Repetition and Extension

The Host miracle attempts to re-enact and to recapture the revolutionary power inherent in Christ's first Crucifixion. As Victor Scherb notes, in the *Play of the Sacrament*, "It is almost as if the original Passion had lost its efficacy, and the miracle of transubstantiation in the Mass was not enough" (74). Scherb is right: the original Passion should have long since lost its power, since that power derived from its nature as revolution; the miracle of transubstantiation, now the rule and not its exception, had become a stagnant law just waiting to be broken. Revolution is always short-lived, giving way to either the sadistic institution or the masochistic law. In their turn, these institutions and laws become subject to subsequent revolutions -- a disturbing thought for any dominant power. The Christian solution was to create and instill in its adherents an ideology of persecution and of rebellion: to keep the revolution fresh, it had to sustain the immediacy of Christ's seditious self-sacrifice. One way of doing this was to repeat it *ad infinitum*, and so Christian children were allegedly murdered by menacing Jews while vulnerable Hosts were subjected to horrendous blasphemies at the hands of the same. Elaborate conspiracies were imagined between Muslims, Jews, and heretics, and thus, despite the fact that it was the dominant religion throughout Western Europe, Christianity managed to sustain a remarkably (un)healthy persecution complex bordering on delusional paranoia.

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* plays a small part in this repetition of Christ's rebellion and in the resultant Christian fantasy of persecution. Transported to -- even, it seems, abandoned in -- liminal Spain, the Host initially appears a sheep among wolves, an innocent at the mercy of debauched, foreign sadists. The miracle that ensues is repeatedly referred to as a "new paynfull passioun" (933), and so its nature as an event separate yet related to the original Crucifixion is carefully stressed. Yet, Christ's Passion itself was often depicted as both complete and still in process: artistic representations portrayed Christ as perpetually wounded, while believers were encouraged to engage in elaborate and sustained meditations on the moment of Christ's death, almost as though past events were unfolding in the present. Mystics such as Margery Kempe and Marguerite of Oingt not only imagined the incidents surrounding Christ's capture and execution, but projected themselves back into the historical scene -- or perhaps, projected the historical scene forward to include and accommodate themselves. Margery imagines herself cooking a drink of gruel and hot wine for the grieving Virgin Mary after the Burial (*Book of Margery Kempe* ch. 81), while Margeurite removes the nails from Christ's feet and hands after his death.[95]

Christ's revolution was not only kept current through repetition but also through extension. Christianity became one long moment of rebellion and resignification since the Passion was at once both historical and thus repeatable, and contemporary and thus continual. Of course, rebellion is impossible to sustain, and so what Christianity really succeeded in instituting was an institution or law of lawless revolution. All of this began at the moment of Christ's Incarnation and culminated in the events of his death and Resurrection. The Passion was the moment of Christianity's birth as well as the limits of its pre-Judgement horizon.

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[95] "And when I see that the evil crowd has left, I approach and take out the nails and then I carry him on my shoulders down from the cross and put him between the arms of my heart" (trans. in Bynum, *Fragmentation* 168).

Chapter 5

God and the Law

1. Christ and the Construction of the New Law: Theories of Martyrdom

As discussed in chapter two and alluded to in the analysis above, Christ appeared to establish a new system of signification with his Crucifixion and eventual Resurrection. Within this "new" system, sacrifice ceded its authority to sacrament, circumcision gave way to baptism, and Mosaic law was reduced to its first two and most important commandments:

> 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matt. 22.37-40)

Christ also succeeded in resignifying, not only for himself but for all of humankind, concepts of death and defeat. In so doing, he established a kind of law of martyrdom, in which physical suffering became a desirable, even integral, part of spiritual identity. According to Tertullian, part of the attraction of martyrdom to the individual Christian or prospective convert lay in its promise of a complete remission of sins:

> Who, on inquiry, does not join us, and joining us, does not wish to suffer, that he may purchase for himself the whole grace of God, that he may win full pardon from God by paying his own blood for it? For all sins are forgiven to a deed like this. That is why, on being sentenced by you [the Romans], on the instant we render you thanks. (*Apologeticus* 227; ch. 50)

To the larger Christian community of which the individual formed part, martyrdom offered an "aggressive" counterstrategy for combatting paganism and idolatry:

> The injunction is given me not to make mention of any other god, not even by speaking, -- as little by the tongue as by the hand, -- to fashion a god, and not to worship or in any way show reverence to another than Him only who thus commands me, whom I am both bid fear that I may not be forsaken by Him, and love with my whole being, that I may die for Him. Serving as a soldier under this oath, I am challenged by the enemy. If I surrender to them, I am as they are. In maintaining this oath, I fight furiously in battle, am wounded, hewn in pieces, slain . . . . I stoutly maintain that martyrdom is good, as required by the God by whom likewise idolatry is forbidden and punished. For martyrdom strives against and opposes idolatry . . . . Who will not proclaim that to be good which delivers from idolatry? What else is the opposition between idolatry and martyrdom, than that between life and death? (*Scorpiace* 637; ch. 4, 5)

Martyrdom also provided both the individual and the group the opportunity of participating in the very sacrifice made by Christ for their salvation and, in his wake, made by the apostles for the faith:

> that the apostles endured such sufferings, we know: the teaching is clear . . . . The prisons there, and the bonds, and the scourges, and the big stones, and the swords, and the onsets by the Jews, and the assemblies of the heathen, and the indictments by tribunes, and the hearing of causes by kings, and the judgment-seats of pro-consuls and the name of Caesar, do not need an interpreter. That Peter is struck, that Stephen is overwhelmed *by stones*, that James is slain as is a victim at the altar, that Paul is beheaded has been written in their own blood . . . . Wherever I read of these occurrences, so soon as I do so, I learn to suffer. (648; ch. 15)

In Tertullian's day, a debate raged over whether or not martyrdom offered a simple opportunity for saintly advancement or was a basic moral obligation required of all believers, and therefore whether or not this extreme form of *imitatio Christi* constituted a law of Christianity. Tertullian, a strong proponent of the latter view, outlines his opponents' arguments in *Scorpiace, or the Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting*:

> Men are perishing without a reason . . . . to die for God is, since he preserves me, not even artlessness, but folly, nay madness. If He kills me, how will it be His duty to preserve me? Once for all Christ died for us, once for all He was slain that we might not be slain. If He demands the like from me in return, does He also look for salvation from my death by violence? Or does God importune for the blood of men, especially if He refuses that of bulls and he-goats? Assuredly He had rather have the repentance than the death of the sinner. And how is He eager for the death of those who are not sinners? (634; ch. 1)

Tertullian counters this argument by referring to Scripture, both old and new. As discussed above, he cites Old Testament injunctions against idolatry and the worshipping of false gods -- a very present danger in third-century Rome, since Christians were forced to make offerings to the pagan gods in order to disprove their heretical beliefs or allegiances. He also appeals to statements made by Christ himself, who, Tertullian writes, at the very least *foretold* the persecution of his apostles and of all believers or "possessors of the name":

> 'Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' . . . . 'Blessed shall ye be when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, since very great is your reward in heaven; for so used their fathers to do even to the prophets' . . . . 'Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves;' and, 'Beware of men, for

> they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues, and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles' . . . . 'But the brother will deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.' (641; ch. 9, quoting Matt. 5.10, 11-12; 10.16-18, 21)

Yet these predictions of persecutions to come are also very firm prescriptions, Tertullian argues, reminding his readers of Christ's ominous words: "whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny also before my Father who is in heaven . . . . Whosoever shall be ashamed of me before men, of him will I also be ashamed before my Father who is in Heaven" (642; ch. 9, quoting Matt. 10.33). Living in a society in which confession of Christ led almost inevitably to bodily death, Tertullian maintained that any denial of Christ always and invariably leads to spiritual death. Martyrdom, or *imitatio Christi* becomes an obligation or requirement made of even ordinary, average, unremarkable Christian men and women:

> 'The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his own lord;' because, seeing the Master and Lord Himself was stedfast [sic] in suffering persecution, betrayal and death, much more will it be the duty of His servants and disciples to bear the same, that they may not seem as if superior to Him, or to have got an immunity from the assaults of unrighteousness. (641; ch. 9, quoting Matt. 10.24)

So long as the name of Christ remained "an object of hatred," believers would be required to give their lives for that name (641; ch. 9). So long as the "assaults of unrighteousness" continued against Christians, cheerful martyrdoms would be required of all.

However, Christ's name did not remain "an object of hatred" and the "assaults of unrighteousness" eventually stopped. With the conversion of Rome to Christianity under Constantine in 313 CE, persecutions and executions of Christians, if they did not entirely cease, then substantially decreased in both number and frequency. Physical martyrdom thus became a less commonplace and less probable option or obligation for the average Christian at the very time when the idea of suffering for Christ had taken on monumental importance with regard to future reward.[1] Willingness to subject oneself to persecution remained a requirement for every believer even though external persecution had all but vanished, and therefore internal persecution or self-inflicted suffering became an accepted (if lesser) form of martyrdom (Rubin, "Choosing Death?" 154-55). Writing in the late fourth-century (between 387 and 391), Saint Ambrose in *De bono mortis* (Death as a Good) outlines three possible types of death: the death of the soul due to sin; the death of all bodily pleasure for life in God; and the death of the physical body itself, which separates soul and flesh (in *Seven Exegetical Works* 71). Ambrose describes the second kind or class of death as a type of *imitatio Christi* and, more specifically, as an authentic imitation of the Saviour's revolutionary persecution and death:

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[1] See Miri Rubin, "Choosing Death?":

> What do the just accomplish in this life but to divest themselves of the contagions of the body, that bind us like fetters? They strive to free themselves from these vexations, they renounce luxury and pleasures, they flee the fires of lust. Doesn't each person who dwells in this life undergo something like death, if he is able so to act that all his bodily pleasures die and he himself dies to all his desires and the allurements of the world, as Paul had died, saying 'The world has been crucified to me and I to the world'"? . . . And so a man prefigures death when he withdraws from the sharing of this body and frees himself from the fetters about which the Lord spoke to you. (75, 76)

"Such a death," the death of extreme asceticism and self-mortification, "should be sought by those who dwell in this life, so that the death of Christ may be manifest in our body" (76). "[T]hat death is happy," Ambrose concludes, "in which 'our outer man is decaying that our inner man may be renewed'" (76, quoting 2 Cor. 4.16).

By the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, self-mortification became the rule and not the exception. Manifestations of Christ's Passion and Death were seen in the wounds of Francis

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> The early martyrs, with whose blood Christianity had become established in the Roman world, were joined by a sprinkling of missionary monks, victims of Muslim conquest, or of the ravages of the Norsemen. But as Europe came to be a Christian community, occasions for persecution and execution by tyrants and hostile pagan rulers declined. There was a definite sense in which martyrdom was receding -- that martyrs were few and precious; that their remains were treasures which could not be matched. The dilemma now faced was to shape the meaning of the tradition of martyrdom: how should this world come to terms with this end of martyrdom? What should the appropriate location and use of memories of martyrs be? What authority might those who had not suffered an equal sacrifice claim in a Christian world? (154)

of Assisi and of countless other (mainly female) stigmatics, while mystics such as Alice of Schaerbeke and Julian of Norwich desired and prayed to be inflicted with terrible illnesses so that they might themselves be purged of all sin (see Bynum, *Fragmentation* 133, Julian's *Shewings* ch. 2). Human suffering as *imitatio Christi* even assumed some of the Crucifixion's original salvic power. Alice of Shaerbeke told a sister, "I suffer . . . for those who are already dead and in the place of penitence [purgatory] and for the sins of the world," while Catherine of Genoa, "the great theorist of purgatory," suggested that individual asceticism and voluntary suffering allows for more than just a personal, pleasurable union with Christ, and actually constitutes "service of one's fellows" since "it can substitute for others' time in purgatory" (trans. in Bynum, *Fragmentation* 69). Thus, the individual's suffering becomes an obligation owed from one Christian, one servant, to the other in addition to an obligation owed by the servant to his or her master. "Martyrdom," in the form of extreme asceticism and the metaphoric death of the body, constituted a kind of law of *imitatio Christi* in which Christ's larger concern for his "fellow" man was mimicked by the believer as was his simple, "seditious" act of physical suffering.

2. Martyrdom in the Cycles and Collections

Strictly speaking, the only early martyrdom directly represented in medieval English drama is that of Christ himself. Yet reference is made to the deaths of the apostles as well as to the deaths (or at very least the sufferings) of subsequent martyrs and (degrees of) ascetics. The Chester, York, and Towneley plays in particular suggest that persecution is not the sole property or duty of biblical or early Christians and therefore is not safely contained in the past. Rather, future persecution is not only a possibility but inevitability, and constitutes an important condition of final, personal salvation for each individual.

The plays begin by evoking and thus establishing the tradition of Christian martyrdom. In York, for example, the apostles themselves report that the Jews and leaders of the law are plotting their deaths. The disciples are completely incapacitated by this knowledge and by their fear, and therefore hope that God will send them some assistance -- preferably in the form of physical protection:

Petrus
Allas, to woo þat we wer wrought,
Hadde never no men so mekill þought,
Sen that oure lorde to dede was brought
With Jewes fell [fierce];
Oute of þis steede [place] ne durste we noght,
But here ay dwelle.

Johannes
Here haue we dwelte with peynes strang;
Of oure liffe vs lothis, we leve to lenge
For sen the Jews wrought vs þat wrong
Oure lorde to sloo,
Durste we neuere come þame emang,
Ne hense to goo.

Jacobus
Þe wikkid Jewes hatis vs full ille,
And bittir paynes wolde putte vs till.
Therfore I rede þat we dwelle stille
Here þer we lende [remain],
Vnto þat Criste oure lorde vs wille
Some socoure sende. (41.1-18)

God, however, does not intend to help the disciples avoid their imminent martyrdoms, as Christ makes clear to the audience at his Ascension:

Mi tythandis [news, tidings] tane has my menȝe
To teche þe pepull wher they fare,
In erthe schall þei leue aftir me
And suffir sorowes sadde and sare.
Dispised and hatted schall þei be,
Als I haue bene, with lesse and mare [among men of lesser and greater degree],
And suffer dede in sere degré [will suffer particularly painful deaths]
For sothfastnesse schall none þem spare. (42.65-72)

Thus, when the disciples finally disperse after the Assumption of the Virgin, the audience understands that each goes to his death. Thomas sets out for India (45.287-88) where, according to tradition, he will be executed (Holweck 977); Peter leaves for Rome (289-90), where he will be killed during the persecution of Christians under Nero (Holweck 797); James will minister to the Samaritians (291-92) and will be put to death by Herod Agrippa, becoming the second Christian martyr and the first among the apostles to die for the faith (Acts 12.2; Holweck 518); Andrew leaves for Achaia (293-94), in what is now modern Greece, where he is eventually crucified on an x-shaped cross (Holweck 72-73). John, who sets out for Asia (298), will be the only apostle to die of natural causes, but not before he has survived an attempted martyrdom by boiling in oil under order of the Roman emperor Domitian (Holweck 548-49).

The apostles' ability and willingness to suffer such horrific martyrdoms is attributed, in Chester, to the power of the Holy Spirit -- not to the power of their individual wills. In Play 21, the play of Pentecost, Christ tells the audience that his disciples, who have yet to receive the Holy Ghost, are weak and unstable. Following the gift of the Spirit, however, they will be firm and unyielding, and ready to take on the challenge of ministering to the nations:

> Throughout the world they shall gonne,
> my deedes to preach manye one.
> Yett steadfastnes in them ys nonne
> to suffer for me anoye.
> Fletchinge [vacillating] yett they binne ichone.
> But when my Ghoost ys them upon,
> then shall they after be styffe as stonne
> my deedes to certyfie. (207-14)

The apostles' (and martyrs') faith will, after Pentecost, be strong enough to carry them to their bitter ends. Once they have received the Spirit, according to Christ, "Dreade of death ne no distres / shall lett [hinder] them of stydfastnes" (215-16).

Both Bartholomew and Matthias (who has just been elected to replace Judas as the twelfth apostle) effectively illustrate this transition from cowardice to courage. Immediately upon receiving the spirit, Bartholomew declares:

> soe styffe I am of beleevinge
> that I doubt [fear] neyther prynce ne kynge
> my maysters myracles for to mynge [remember]
> and for his love to dye. (283-86)

To this, Matthias adds:

> Nowe sythen my lord to heaven steegh [ascended]
> and send his Ghooste as hee beheight [promised],
> to all distresses nowe am I drest [prepared, ready]
> and dye for the love of God almight. (299-302)

Both men will be called to fulfill their promises. Bartholomew, who goes off to preach in Egypt, Persia, India, and Armenia, will eventually be martyred, crucified and / or flayed alive at Albanopolis under order of King Astarges (Holweck 135). Matthias, according to Greek tradition, will suffer a similar fate and be crucified in his turn (Holweck 685).

Neither of these martyrdoms is actually dramatized. The closest any extant Middle English biblical play comes to representing a historical persecution other than that of Christ, is in the N-Town Assumption of Mary, in which an attempt is made by the bishop and princes of the Jews to confiscate the Virgin's body and to kill the disciples. References are made elsewhere in the drama to a possible conspiracy against and therefore threat to the Holy Mother. York at one time contained a play on the very same subject, the funeral of the Virgin, in which Mary's dead body is attacked or set upon by a Jewish doubter, but this play no longer exists. In the Towneley Ascension, the Holy Mother is plagued by fears that the Jews will in some way harm her once Christ has ascended. She complains to her son that he "has laft [her] emangys . . . foes" (339), and begs to be taken with him and away from her enemies: "Take me to the, my son so heynd [loving, gracious], / And let me neuer with Iues be lorne" (396-97). When her request goes unanswered, Mary appeals to the apostle John, asking him to protect her from the threatening Jews. "Help, for my son luf, Iohn, son kynde," she begs, "For ferde that I with Iues be torne" (398-99). This vague threat never actually materializes in Towneley -- likely because, as in York, something is missing from the manuscript.[2] The N-Town Assumption of the Virgin therefore is the only surviving example (of at least three original dramatic accounts) of the Jews' attempted desecration of Mary's body and of the first attempted persecution, even execution, of Christ's twelve apostles.

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[2] In York, Play 46A, *The Funeral of the Virgin,* was never registered and was therefore never actually included in the manuscript, although it was performed on occasion (see Beadle 460). In Towneley, Mary's Funeral and Assumption are likely missing because of a lacuna in Play 29 at line 451. According to Stevens and Cawley, twelve entire leaves are missing from the manuscript

Near the beginning of the play, *Episcopus Legis* (a Jewish "bishop") promises to kill all those who "peruertyth the pepil wyth gay eloquens alon" (43). He declares that all who "feyne falsly [misrepresent] oure feyth" will be "bounden vp be the beltys [belts] til flyes hem blawe, / And gnaggyd [hanged] vp by the gomys [necks] tyl the deuyl doth hem grone" (45-47) -- by the (alliterative) sounds of it, rather gruesome methods of torture and execution. In response, *Secundus Princeps* (the second Jewish "prince," as referred to in the dialogue itself) warns his fellows that the threat posed earlier by the heretic Christ has not entirely dissipated. A rather large group of followers has collected around his mother Mary, who, should she remain at large, is herself capable of putting Jewish law to "myschefe" (60-64). At first, the bishop rashly dismisses the second prince's concerns: "Art thou ferd of a wenche?" he scoffs; "What trowyste [believe] thou sche myht don vs agayn?" (66-67) The third prince points out that Mary is simply part of a larger problem, that there are many "in the contré that clenche [declare] / And prechyn he is levying that we slewe" (68-69). If "they ben sufferyd thus," if the new Christian sect is allowed to continue unharmed and unopposed, "this will bredyn a stench, / For thorow here fayre speche oure lawys they steyn" (71-72). As the third prince warns and advises, the Jews must devise and implement an immediate plan of action, for, "We are but loste yif they [the Christians] reyn" (74).

The bishop then asks the others what they think should be done with Mary and her fellow heretics (75). "Let vs preson hem til here myht schent is," the first prince urges; "Bettyr is to slen

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at this point, a lacuna large enough "to have contained more than a thousand additional lines" (2: 628). They speculate that the excision was deliberate, and that the material censored contained "several Mary plays, including possibly a series similar to that of York, which has a Funeral, Assumption, and Coronation play" (2: 628). The Jewish threat feared by the Virgin Mother in Towneley could then originally have been dramatized, though it no longer forms part of the collection of plays.

hem wyth dentis," the second argues; "Nay," the third counters, "best is to hang hem wyth peyn!" (76-78) Yet the bishop rejects all of their counsel, advising them to consider more carefully the consequence of their actions: "Haue in syth before what after may tide," he warns ominously (80). Like Tertullian, the Jewish leader understands the power of public martyrdom and that Christian blood, once spilt, is as good as seed, and therefore informs the others, "Yif we slewe hem, it wolde cause the comownys to ryse" (81). Instead, he advises, acting in complete secrecy, they will confiscate Mary's body after she has died, burn it, and (presumably to forestall a future relic cult) "the aschis hide" (84). They will then covertly "sle tho disciplis that walkyn so wyde" (86); and, in order to destroy any and all evidence of their crimes, "here bodyes devyde" (86-87).

From the very beginning, however, their cover is blown. Mary herself informs John that "the Jewys meche of me spelle [say]" (224) and "Secretly . . . ordeyne in here conceytis fell [treacherous] / When my sowle is paste, where Godis liste [joy] is, / To brenne my body and schamly it quelle" (226-28). She therefore asks John to see that she will be properly buried (231), which he promises to do (232). The other eleven apostles then miraculously appear at Mary's door, transported by a white cloud. Along with John, the eleven hold vigil at Mary's bedside, protecting her from harm, and when she finally dies, they bear her body to its sepulchre in solemn procession while "angels in heaven sweetly sing 'Alleluia.'" ("*angeli dulciter cantabunt in celo, 'Alleluia,'*" 370 s.d.).

The Holy Virgin's burial is thus conducted in a very public manner, which irritates the bishop and his princes to no end. Whereas the Jews had hoped to operate in shadows and in secrecy, the apostles have marched in open defiance of the law and its leaders: as the third prince complains, the twelve "makyn alle this merthe in spyth of oure hed" (387). The bishop, driven mad by the impudence of his opponents, declares, "Outh! Harrow! The devyl is in myn hed! . . . Al wod [mad] now I go! (389; 409) -- which perhaps in part explains his order to seize Mary's body and to attack the apostles immediately. Forgetting his own advice to proceed carefully and covertly, he commands the princes: "take me that thef [scoundrel]. / And brynge me that bygyd [vile] body . . . And here disciplis ye slo!" (403-04; 405). The first prince assures the bishop, "We schal don schame to that body and to tho prechours" (398), a promise quickly seconded by his two fellows. "Tho teynt [tainted] tretouris schul tene [suffer] yif my loke on hem louris [angry look falls on them]," the second prince blusters (400); "I schal snarle tho sneveleris [snivellers] wyth rith scharp schouris [blows]," the third boasts (402).

Of course, the Jews are not successful in their attempt to make martyrs of the disciples at this time and to desecrate Mary's body. When they try to stone the disciples to death, the twelve disappear and their attackers are robbed of all strength (410-12); likewise, when the first prince irreverently grabs for Mary's body, he finds both of his hands are miraculously and securely fastened to her bier (424-25). Mary is simply not an appropriate object for heathen persecution, and the time is not yet ripe for the martyrdom of the apostles. However, their fate is sealed, as is suggested by a small detail found in the play but not in its principle source.

When Mary's soul ascends from the earth in the arms of Christ, it is welcomed into heaven by a *Chorus Martyrum*, or a Chorus of Martyrs, who sing, "Who is this who ascends from the desert, abounding with delights, leaning upon her lover?"[3] This question forms part of the liturgy of the Feast of the Assumption (see Spector 2: 533, ll. 343-47n.), and is found originally in the Song of Songs (8.5). The *Legenda Aurea* ascribes it to a general assembly or "coetus" of those in heaven who wonder at Mary's identity when they see Christ approach "bearing a female soul in his arms" ("feminae animam in ulnis propriis baiulantem," Spector 2: 533, ll. 343-47n.) -- no specific mention is made of a Chorus of Martyrs. However, the ascription seems appropriate in N-Town since the disciples gathered in reverence around Mary's body face an immediate threat to their lives and are fated in future to comprise part of such a heavenly chorus. Peter's words, directly preceding those of the martyrs, effectively remind the audience of this:

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[3] "Que est ista que assendit de deserto / Deliciis affluens, innixa super dilectum suum" (343-44).

> In oure tribulacyouns, Lord, thou vs defende;
>   We haue no comfort on erthe but of the alon.
> O swete soule of Mary, prey thy sone vs defende;
>   Haue mynde of thy pore brether when thou comyst to þi tron. (339-42)

In a sense, the apostles attend, at present, to Mary's body on earth and, in future, to her soul in heaven. The *Chorus Martyrum* offers an ominous warning of what is yet to come.

The disciple's "future" martyrdoms have, of course, long since passed, and therefore cannot be the object of anything more than dramatic tension or suspense. This is not the case in the Chester plays of Antichrist's prophets and of Antichrist, where the threat of suffering and persecution is kept current and very real for the audience. At the time of the Apocalypse, a time contained in the actual (and not just dramatic) future, vast numbers of men and women will be added to the Chorus of Martyrs when, after having been converted to Christianity by Enoch and Elijah, they are slain by Antichrist. The Chester *Expositor* explains the significance of Saint John the Evangelist's prophetic vision of "two wittnesses" sent by God "false faythes for to defende / that raysed were by his [God's] foe" (182-84) in Play 22:

> These two wyttnes, wytterlye [certainly],
> hee sayde the should come and prophecye,
> that one ys Enock, the other Helye --
> shall have greate might and mayne
> that when Antechrist comes in hye
> Goddes people for to destroye,
> that he deceaveth falselye
> they shall convert agayne.
>
> Manye signes they shall shewe
> which the people shall well knowe,
> and in theire token truely trowe
> and leeve [believe] yt steadfastlye.
> And all that turne, leeve you mee,
> Antechrist will slea through his postie;
> but verey martyrs they shalbee
> and come to heaven one hye
> . . . .
> and at the last, witterlye,

he shall slea Enock and Helye
in Jerusalem, as read I,
even in myddest of the streete. (221-36, 241-44)

These are the exact events dramatized in Play 23, *De Adventu Antechristi* -- The Advent of Antichrist. In both the dramatic and real-time future, *Expositor* warns, believers will be required to suffer persecution and death for their faith.

However, this does not mean that present-day Christians who die before the last days are exempt from this requirement or obligation, as Christ himself reveals in two very similar passages from the York and Towneley Judgements.[4] Just as he does in Chester (24.357-427), Christ, the man of sorrows, initially addresses his "resurrected" audience in the form of a complaint:

Here may ȝe see my woundes wide,
  Þe whilke I tholed [suffered] for youre mysdede.
Thurgh harte and heed, foote, hande and hide,
  Nought for my gilte, butt for youre nede.
Beholdis both body, bak and side,
  How dere I bought youre brotherhede.
Þes bittir peynes I wolde abide --
  To bye you blisse þus wolde I bleede.

Mi body was scourged withouten skill,
  As theffe full thraly [violently] was I thrette;
On crosse þei hanged me, on a hill,
  Blody and bloo, as I was bette,
With croune of thorne throsten full ill.
  Þis spere vnto my side was sette --
Myne harte-bloode spared noght þei for to spill;
  Manne, for thy loue wolde I not lette

. . . .
Þus was I dight [treated] þi sorowe to slake;
  Manne, þus behoued [it was necessary] þe to borowed be.
In all my woo toke I no wrake [retribution].
  Mi will it was for þe loue of þe. (York 47.245-260, 269-72; Towneley 30.576-91, 600-03)

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[4] Because Christ's speech is so similar in both of these plays, it seems likely that the author of the Towneley Judgement "borrowed" this particular section from York -- see Stevens and Cawley 2: 633 and 643, l. 560n..

Unlike his counterpart in Chester, however, the York and Towneley Christ ends his complaint with a simple statement and a troubling question. He advises all those who now view his battered body -- and so all men and women who have ever lived -- "sore aught þe for to quake. / Þis dredfull day þis sight to see" (York 273-74; Towneley 604-605). "All þis I suffered for þi sake," he adds, displaying his many wounds. "Say, man, what suffered þou for me?" (York 275-76; Towneley 606-07).

3. Christ and the Construction of a New Law: Mercy

Suffering is therefore presented as a condition of individual salvation: since Christ endured persecution and death for humankind, he in turn expects that suffering to be reciprocated (and to some small degree recompensed) in the lives of men and women. In much the same way, Christ makes the act of human mercy a provision for receiving divine mercy.

All four Judgement plays dramatize the well-known gospel scenario (described in Matt. 25.31-33) in which Christ separates the saved from the damned, the sheep from the goats.[5] The two groups are distinguished one from the other based upon their willing and cheerful fulfillment of six acts of mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, comforting the sick, visiting those in prison, and harboring the homeless.[6] In Chester, Christ tells those who

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[5] When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

[6] See Matt. 25: 34-46:

> Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you,

have been merciful and charitable on earth that they will be "quytte [repaid] that thinge / in heaven an hundrethfold" (24.467-68); he then informs those who showed no mercy and compassion while alive that they will themselves receive no mercy and compassion now that they are dead (605-28). In the N-Town Judgement play, the souls of the damned plead with Christ to save them from their terrible fate:

> Ha! Ha! Mercy! Mercy! Mercy, we crye and crave!
>   A, mercy, Lorde, for oure misdede!
> A, mercy, mercy! We rubbe [run about], we rave!
>   A, help us, good Lord, in þis nede. (42.66-69)

Christ, however, rejects their frantic requests, posing them the following, rather difficult and strangely familiar question:

> How wolde ȝe wrecchis any mercy haue?
>   Why aske ȝe mercy now in þis nede?
> What haue ȝe wrought ȝoure sowle to saue?
>   To whom haue ȝe don any mercyful dede,
>   Mercy for to wynne? (70-74)

"Ȝe had no peté on seke nor lame," Christ continues, answering the question for them; "Dede of mercy wold ȝe nevyr don" (83-84). He then reminds them of the boundless compassion he showed for them in and through the Crucifixion, when "For ȝoure love was I rent on rode. / And for ȝoure sake I shed my blode" (88-89) -- and of the fact that his example in this went completely

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> or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you? Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

N-Town adds a seventh act to this list: "To bery the deed pore man" (42.86). All seven acts of mercy (though only six were biblical) formed part of the Church's program of instruction from the thirteenth century (Lumiansky and Mills 2: 369, ll. 453-92n.).

unheeded by them while alive. "Whan I was so mercyfull and so gode," he asks, "Why haue ȝe wrought aȝens my wylle?" (90-91) Why, he inquires, did you not operate according the new law, established at the time of the Passion, of enduring suffering in return for suffering and of showing mercy in the hope of receiving mercy?

This notion or law of reciprocity to which Christ appeals adds a certain justice to what Justice, at least in representations of the Parliament of Heaven, most opposes. It does so by setting conditions to and defining the limits of an apparently conditionless and limitless concept: that of mercy and forgiveness, and of turning the other cheek. God will be disposed to show final mercy only to those who have shown it to others themselves, or, following the logic and example of the *Castle of Perseverance* and of the Chester Judgement, to those who have requested mercy before their deaths. Once a legal precedent for salvation has been established it becomes law, whether mercy is granted in return for mercy or in return for repentance, no matter how late.

At the death of the generic Mankind figure in the *Castle of Perseverance*, the four daughters of God -- Truth, Justice, Peace, and Mercy -- debate amongst themselves whether Mankind "schal cheve [attain] / To hell or heuene" (3235-36). The debate is simultaneously over the fate of the entire human race (as indicated in the generic character designation, "Mankind") and over the fate of the believing, yet grossly sinful, individual. Truth states quite clearly to God the Father that she can have no place at humankind's judgement if Mercy is present there:

> For if Man haue mercy and grace
>   Þanne I, þi dowtyr Sothfastnesse,
> At þi dom schal haue no place
>   But be putte abak be wronge dures. (3301-04)

Despite these heavy warnings, God the Father (*Pater Sedens in trono*) decides

> Not aftyr deseruynge to do reddere [to punish],
>   To dampne Mankynde to turmentry,
> But [to] brynge hym to my blysse ful clere
>   In heune to dwelle endelesly. (3565-68)

He states quite bluntly that Truth and Justice must in future cede to their nemeses Peace and Mercy:

To make my blysse perfyth
I menge [mix] wyth my most myth
Alle pes, sum treuthe, and sum ryth,
And most of my mercy. (3570-73)

In deciding that Mankind shall be brought to "blysse" despite his considerable list of sins and lack of good works, God the Father indicates that mercy will be used in relation to all of humankind throughout the new age ushered in by Christ. Yet, by deciding that Mankind the individual will be brought to bliss despite his sinfulness and last-minute repentance, God the Father sets a troubling, because specific, precedent for salvation. As Truth warns her sisters:

Late repentaunce if man saue scholde,
Wheyþer he wrouth wel or wyckydnesse,
Þanne euery man wold be bolde
To trespas in trost of forȝevenesse. (3275-78)

In the play, it is quite obvious that Mankind does just this. He repents of his sinful ways only in the last thirty-seven lines preceding his death, yet still hopes that God will help him, "For," in his own words, "'mercy' was my laste speche" (3027-28). Before his death, he holds himself up as a negative example to other men and women to repent "whyl ȝe han spase" (2995-96), only to learn less than six hundred lines later that he himself has managed to do this, and so has sought forgiveness in a timely enough fashion. Therefore, when God the Father (or the actor representing him) at the end of the play also offers Mankind as a model or case in point to audience members, saying, "All men example here-at may take / To mayntein þe goode and mendyn here mys" (3643-44), it is difficult if not impossible to determine whether that example is intended to be positive or negative. Of course, it is implied that believers should not repent with as little time to spare as does Mankind, but this is beside the point. The efficacy of death-bed repentance has been established; a legal precedent has been set and cannot easily be revoked.

We see this particular "law" of mercy at work again in the Chester Judgement. In this play, the souls, good works, and even sins of the saved -- a Pope, an Emperor, a King, and a Queen *salvatus* -- are contrasted and compared with those of the damned -- a Pope, an Emperor, a King, a Queen, a Judge, and a Merchant *damnatus*. One notices immediately that there are more damned souls than saved, more goats than sheep, and more importantly, that both groups count among their numbers popes and emperors, kings and queens. Every soul, whether destined for heaven or for hell, gives an account of his or her many sins, and there is a marked similarity in the kind or nature of sin committed by those who occupied like positions or offices. For example, both emperors, saved and damned, reveal that they gave into covetous impulses while alive: *Imperator Salvatus* admits, "I to synne were bayne [obedient] and bowne [bound] / and coveted ryches and renowne" (93-94); later, *Imperator Damnatus* confesses, "Nowe covetousnes makes my care keene" (222). *Rex Salvatus* was concerned only his "flesh to further and to feede" (123) and therefore decided that he had no need of God (119), while *Rex Damnatus*, wracked by lechery and covetousness (257-58), plundered or "reaved" religion "agaynst the right" (255). *Reginae Salvatae et Damnatae* both cultivated fleshliness and coveted earthly things. *Salvata* confesses, while *Damnata* curses, her love of fine clothing and concern for appearance:

> While I in yearth rych can goe
> in softe sandalles and silke alsoe,
> velvet also that wrought me woe,
> and all such other weedes,
> neyther prayed I ney faste. (149-53)
>
> Fye on pearles! Fye on prydee!
> Fye on gowne! Fye on guyde [possessions]!
> Fye on hewe! Fye on hyde!
> These harrowe me to hell. (277-80)

Salvata admits that she used any and everything that "might excyte lecherye" in others, "perrelles and precyouse perrye [jewelry]" (161-162). *Damnata*, confessing in turn, concedes, "Of lecherye

I never wrought [had a care], / but ever to that synne I sought" (273-74); "of that fylth in deede and thought / yett had I never that fyll" (275-76).

In the above examples, there is very little difference in nature or degree of sin between damned and saved, except perhaps in the case of the condemned Emperor, who confesses to acts of manslaughter, gluttony, and falsehood in addition to his sin of covetousness (221, 227, 231). In general, the distinguishing feature of those who are saved is not a holy life but a heart-felt repentance -- and more specifically, a repentance made at the last possible moment, perhaps even on the individual's death bed. *Imperator Salvatus* has spent the last thousand years in purgatory thanks to a quick conversion at the end of his life; gratefully addressing his "lord and soveraygne savyoure," he reveals that "at the last contrytion / hath made mee on of thyne" (81; 95-96). *Rex Salvatus* and *Regina Salvata* in turn attribute their narrow escapes from hell to a combination of merciful acts bestowed by them upon their fellow humans beings and to an act of divine mercy bestowed upon them by Christ in answer to their own requests for forgiveness and compassion:

> But Lord, though I were synfull aye,
> contrytion yett at my last daye
> and almes-deedes that I dyd aye
> hath holpen me from hell. (133-36)
>
> Saffe almes-deedes, yf any paste,
> and great repentance at the laste
> hath gotten me to thy grace. (154-56)

Both "rules" or "laws" of mercy are invoked here. They lend a comforting regularity, even an impressive "legality," to Christ's new, potentially anarchic age of mercy and compassion. An element of stabilizing justice is thus introduced to that which Truth and Justice oppose, and to that which, they warn, would gladly bring about their destruction.

4. The New Law as Old, and the Possibility of a Third Age

As reassuring as this might seem, there is an inherent danger in such a stabilization or regularization of Christ's revolutionary project, both of mercy and of martyrdom. As Artaud himself cautions, distrustful of the word and of written masterpieces, any established law is as good as dead and can, even must, be eventually superseded. This is especially true within the logic of Christianity, an institution founded upon an act of revolution. Christ came in the past to put an end to the old law; it therefore seems reasonable to suppose that God might, at some point in the future, put an end to the new. The new law was already very old in the Middle Ages -- Christ had lived and died more than a thousand years in the past, at the alleged "midpoint" of human history -- and so speculations concerning the possibility of a new, divinely sanctioned age abounded. The individual believer was faced with the daunting task of recognizing, identifying, and acknowledging this new age and its spiritual leader, and thus of distinguishing both from the antichrists and their heretical teachings promised in Scripture as tokens of the coming apocalypse (1 John 2.18, Matt. 24.23-26). More difficult still, as evinced by the Jew's response to the Messiah and to his new law, would be the Christian's final recognition that all significance had been emptied from the rites and ceremonies instituted by Christ and observed by the Catholic Church. The believer's first impulse in such a situation would be to cling to the shadow of the old new law, to embrace type and figure instead of truth, and thus to judaize.

Because English biblical drama skips over or omits the expanse of time between Christ's Ascension or Mary's Assumption and Last Judgement, it appears to avoid the problem of a possible third age. However, this is not the case: the plays that do exist within the limited historical frame of the "cycle" are informed by, even indirectly address, medieval theories concerning this future age and the always impending revolution it was alleged to contain. For this reason, a short departure from the drama will be made in order to discuss some of the more influential and interesting orthodox and heretical claims. The similarities among them are striking and are important, evincing what appears to be a pattern or law of repeated Christian revolution. This pattern had to be interrupted or broken (or satisfied in some other way) in order for Christianity to retain a coherent form over any extended period of time.

The most influential proponent or prophet of a future revolution and coming third "age" was the twelfth-century Cistercian monk Joachim of Fiore. Elements of his analysis of human history and eschatology are found in heretical and orthodox writings well into the sixteenth century and beyond. Joachim's basic premise -- that the structure of God is reflected in the state of his creation -- held a deep attraction for medieval and early modern Christians who, as a general rule, were fascinated by notions of universal harmony and divinely inspired order. According to Joachim, the pattern of the Trinity was from the beginning "built into the fabric of the time process" (Reeves 5): in total, three periods of human history were to unfold before the second coming of the Lord and the resultant termination of linear time. The first *status*,[7] that of the Father and of the old law, had already passed; the second *status*, that of the Son and of the new law, was (in the late twelfth century) nearing its completion; and therefore the third *status*, that of the Holy Spirit, was about to begin (6). The transitions from *status* to *status* would be far from simple, since all members of the Godhead were to participate in every age (though the work of one would temporarily become more dominant), and since each age proceeded from and thus located its origins in its preceding *status* or *stati* (6). As Marjorie Reeves explains, "because the Son proceeds from the Father, the origins of His work must lie back in the Father's sphere," and because "the Spirit proceeds from both Father and Son, there must be a double root to His work, one in the '*status*' of the Father and the other in that of the Son" (5-6).

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[7] I follow Reeves and McGuin in leaving *status* italicized and thus, to a certain degree, semantically opaque. The term is not an easy one to translate, since it encompasses shades of meaning as various as those suggested by the English words "status," "state," "condition," "circumstance," "position," and even "posture" or "attitude."

The work of the third person of God, the Holy Spirit, represents the culmination and crowning illumination of history as well as of the preceding two covenants or holy testaments (6). These two testaments are apparently "never [to] be abrogated" (6) and are only to be explicated in their true spiritual sense in the coming third *status*. There will be no third testament, nor will there be a third Church to supplant the Roman, for "the Latin Church will stand until the Second Advent just as the Synagogue did until the First" (7). This does not mean, however, that the Church and all Christian believers will not experience drastic change. Although, strictly speaking, history is "completed in its two parts . . . hovering over each there is a third development, a new quality of life rather than a third set of institutions, a quasimystical state rather than a new age" (6). In this state, the Church will transform from an *ecclesia activa* to an *ecclesia contemplativa* (7), will embrace the fully revealed *intellectus spiritualis* or spiritual understanding of Scripture, and after a brief but intense struggle, will enjoy a period of peace and beatitude not experienced on earth since the fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise (McGinn 191).

Just as Christ's Passion was prefigured in the paschal sacrifice, this new age of spiritual understanding and contemplation was prefigured in -- or rather initiated by -- Christ's Resurrection from the dead. At the moment of his rising, "the tomb of the letter was opened and the spiritual understanding appeared" (McGinn 125); yet this first appearance of the *intellectus spiritualis*, while of tremendous significance and importance, remained incomplete and needed more fully to be explained and revealed. This is the responsibility or "work of the Holy Spirit as history builds toward the *plenitude* of its third *status*" (125) and the Church approaches its battle with Antichrist. The Spirit will be opposed at every turn by those who adhere to a literalist exegesis of Scripture, and so by Judaizers. Just as "Jewish Christianity lost its primatial position due to its adherence to carnal understanding . . . In the apocalyptic struggles to come the pagans and heretics will outlaw the dissemination of the spiritual understanding" (126-27), as will Antichrist. According to Joachim, they will attempt (as did the Jews who crucified Christ) "to snuff out the spiritual understanding and bury it in the belly of the letter so that its voice might be heard no more in their streets, nor have any further place in their possessions" (*Expositio in Apocalypsim*, trans. in McGinn 127). Ironically, in so doing, the Spirit's opponents will succeed only in burying themselves in the tomb long-vacated by Christ, and so will suffer the carnal death he came to overcome. As Paul warns in his second letter to the Corinthians, after Christ's advent all believers are called to be "ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (3.6).

Approximately fifty years after Joachim's death, a young, fanatical Franciscan by the name of Gerard di Borgo San Donnino, picking up on the revolutionary aspects of the deceased Cistercian's theories but disregarding his conservative views on the eternal nature of the extant Scriptures, prophesied that the third age of the Spirit was about to begin (in 1260) and that at this time an Eternal Evangel, compiled by Gerard himself, was to supersede both Old and New Testaments (Reeves 33; McGinn 127). This Eternal Evangel or Gospel appears to have been a condensation of Joachim's three major works, supplemented (by Gerard) with a *Liber Introductorius* or book of introduction and a gloss (Reeves 33; McGinn 127). According to Gerard, "about the year 1200 the spirit of life had departed from the two Testaments" (Reeves 33) and the "active life of the secular clergy" had given place to "the contemplative life, especially of the *ordo parvulorum*" -- the order of mendicants, of which Gerard himself was a member (33). The young Franciscan, in his enthusiasm to justify the relatively new order of *pauperes Christi*, had misunderstood and misapplied Joachim's theories. As a result, he was imprisoned for life and his entire order was denounced by the Secular Masters' party at the University of Paris as mere "pseudo-prophets presaging the Last Things" (Reeves 33; McGinn 127).

Gerard would not, however, be the last Franciscan to make such revolutionary claims, and thus to appropriate Joachim's three-fold pattern of history to his own ends. In *Postilla in Apocalypsim*, Peter John Olivi outlines his own particular understanding of the three ages, using a rather ingenious idea of three advents of Christ to soften the trinitarianism of Joachim's theory and to maintain a more Christocentric view of history (Reeves 41). According to Olivi, Christ first made an appearance on earth at the time of his Incarnation, ushering in the second *status* of the Son; he then appeared in essence "in the *nova ecclesia* of evangelical reform" (Reeves 41), preparing the way for the *status* of the Holy Spirit. At the end of the third state and so at the end of time, he will make a third and final appearance on earth as he presides over the final judgement of all humankind (41). Thus, at the beginning of the second *status* and again at end of the third, Christ appears in the flesh -- something he does not do at the end of the second and beginning of the third. Here Christ appears in the *imitatio Christi* of St. Francis and his order: just as Christ had come previously to institute a new law and reject carnal Judaism, Francis came to renew Christ's law and to reject the corrupted, carnal Church (42). Olivi's claims seem overtly revolutionary. As Marjorie Reeves expresses it, "These were dangerous words" (42).

The Franciscan friars were as a whole understandably sympathetic to Olivi's readings of their spiritual father and of their prescribed role in the coming third state. Joachimism therefore strongly influenced both mainstream and radical Franciscan eschatology, and so both the moderates within the order who sought only to read the signs of the times, and the Spiritual Franciscans who, with a "heightened expectation of calamity," tried to hurry in the new age by aggressively initiating religious reformation (Reeves 35). The Spirituals identified the "manifestation of the Third Person of the Trinity" in the third *status* "with a renewal of the life of the Second Person in St. Francis who sought the re-enactment of the Passion in his own body" (47). The third *status* was therefore not only the age of the "illuminating Spirit" but of the "re-enacted Word" (47); Francis, through his own example and through the order he founded, encouraged the reformation of the carnal Church by embracing poverty and humbling himself as Christ did. Not surprisingly, the extremely wealthy Roman Church took exception to such claims, and with the election of Pope John XXII, attempted to eradicate all traces of the heretical Spiritual movement from the sanctioned (if in itself heterodox) Franciscan order. Tensions came to a head in Marseilles in 1318 when four friars were burned alive at the stake for refusing to compromise their views on extreme poverty in dress and for their vehement rejection of the practice of storing food in cellars and granaries for future use (Lambert 209).

By dealing with the rebellious friars in this manner, John XXII, "who did most to destroy the [Spiritual] movement, also played a part in pushing it deeper into heresy" (210). The four Franciscans were immediately hailed as martyrs by the religious Spirituals and their lay counterparts, the beguines and beghards,[8] and John XXII was quickly denounced as the Antichrist "who, it was prophesied, would strike against Francis and his true followers" at the end of the second *status* (210). Every subsequent action taken against the Spirituals was read as another "of the persecutions that heralded the opening of the seventh seal of the Apocalypse and the new epoch in history" (210). Therefore, as inquisitorial pressure against the disciples of Peter John Olivi (religious and lay alike) grew in intensity, their beliefs became still more heretical and radical.

A perfect case in point is that of the beguine Prous Boneta, arrested in Montpellier where she had lived by her own account since she was seven (May 7). Brought before the Inquisition in Carcassone in 1325, she remained impenitent and presumably was burned at the stake in the same year (4). Prous held many "conventional" Spiritual or beguine beliefs: she ascribed a special role to St. Francis in the establishment of the new age, claiming that "just as John prepared the way of the Lord in his own person, St. Francis prepared the ways of the Holy Spirit in his;"[9] she also identified the current pope with the Antichrist, informing her accusers that John XXII "was at first called apostle or pope, and after Christ gave to him this most terrible name, that is, Antichrist."[10] In addition, she was convinced that the second *status* would soon give way to the third and final "state of the new Church in which it is necessary to believe in the works of the Holy Spirit."[11]

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[8] Beguines and beghards were lay men and women who attempted to live the *vita apostolica* outside of the traditional monastic institution. They generally lived in a community or *conventus*, submitting to the rule of their particular order yet enjoying a greater freedom because of their lay status. Because neither group was "religious," they depended upon local curates, priests -- and the Franciscan Friars -- to administer the sacraments and provide them spiritual instruction and guidance. It is not surprising, then, that the Spiritual Franciscans influenced the beguines and beghards a great deal; representatives of all three groups were often burned together. See Lerner, *Heresy of the Free Spirit* 36-57, and McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture* 3-8.

However, Prous' "orthodox" heretical beguine beliefs ended here. Elevating Olivi to a state equal (perhaps even superior) to that of St. Francis as prophet of the coming third *status*, she alternately referred to herself as prophet,[12] virgin mother,[13] and actual incarnation of the Holy Spirit.[14] Further, she claimed that the sacrament of the Mass had lost its power because Pope John

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[9] "sicut beatus Joannes paravit viam coram Domino, ita sanctus Franciscus paravit vias coram Spiritu Sancto" (May 22).

[10] "primo vocabatur apostolus seu papa, et postea dedit sibi ipse Christus hoc nomen terribilius, scilicet Antichristum" (16).

[11] "status ecclesiae novus in quo credere oportet in opere Sancti Spiritus" (27; see Reeves 51).

[12] "God said to her . . . 'Saint John the Baptist was the prophet of the coming of the sacred baptism of Jesus Christ, and you are the prophet of the advent of the Holy Spirit'" ("Deus dixit sibi . . . *sanctus Joannes Baptista fuit praeco adventus baptismi sacri Jesu Christi, et tu es praeco adventus Spiritus Sancti*," 8).

[13]
> God said to her: 'the blessed virgin Mary was the giver of the Son of God and you will be the giver of the Holy Spirit' . . . . Also she said that God once told her that two women were named or referred to in Holy Scripture, and that the Son of God was to be given to one of them, and that the Holy Spirit was to be given to the other; and God said that Prous herself was the one to whom the Holy Spirit would be given, and when she asked God that she not be recognized, the Lord said to her: 'it is necessary that you be recognized just as the Virgin Mary was recognized among the apostles;' and finally she consented. [Deus dixit sibi: *beata virgo Maria fuit donatrix Filii Dei et tu eris donatrix Spiritus Sancti* . . . . Item dixit quod semel Deus dixit sibi quod duae foeminae sunt nominatae seu recitatae in sancta scriptura, et quod uni earum debebat dari Filius Dei, et alteri debebat dari Spiritus Sanctus; et dixit illi Deus quod ipsamet Naprous erat illa cui debebat dari Spiritus Sanctus, et cum ipsa rogaret Deum quod non esset cognita, Dominus dixit sibi: *oportet quod tu cognoscaris sicut virgo Maria fuit cognita inter apostolos*; et tandem ipsa consensit.] (11, 20)

[14]
> Also she said and claimed that Christ told her that nine months passed from the day she took her vow of virginity to that day which is the feast of Brother John, on which day [the day she took her vow] the Lord God conceived Prous in spirit; and that on the day she

XXII had destroyed the theological works of Olivi, "which were written by the divine hand."[15] The gates of Paradise had as a result been closed to human souls, and it had become necessary "that Christ die again in person and in spirit so that he might save souls, because otherwise no soul would ever be able to enter Paradise again."[16] Christ was to suffer this second Passion vicariously, through the condemnation of Olivi's writings and through Prous' own rejection and eventual punishment (5). After Prous' sacrifice, the gates of heaven would again be unsealed, but no soul would be allowed to pass through them and approach Paradise unless they had first believed in Prous and had accepted her message. The inquisitor's scribe notes:

> she claimed . . . that whoever wishes to save themselves . . . ought to believe in the words of Prous, for they were spoken through the power of the Holy Spirit . . . . otherwise man may not be saved; and moreover, [she claimed] that the person who does not believe the words of Prous will die the eternal death."[17]

Similar, still more radical, claims had been made at the turn of the century in Milan. There a small cult gathered around a woman named Guglielma who had died in 1282 and, it was claimed, had been the incarnation of the Holy Spirit (Reeves 50; Lambert 201). According to Guglielma's two chief disciples, Andreas Saramita and Manfreda de Pirovano, the incarnate Holy Spirit (in the person of Guglielma) would at some point rise from the dead as did Christ, ascend into heaven,

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> was in Narbonne above the sepulchre of the before-mentioned Peter John, God himself gave birth to her in spirit . . . .
> [Item dixit et asseruit quod Christus dixit sibi quod ab illa die qua fecit votum virginitatis, computatis novem mensibus usque ad illam diem qua est festum fratris Petri Joannis, in tali die ipse dominus Deus concepit ipsam Naprous in spiritu; et quod ipsa die, eadem qua ipsa fuit in Narbona supra sepulcrum dicti fratris Petri Joannis, ipse Dominus peperit eam in spiritu . . . .] (10)

[15] "quia ipse papa destruxit scipturam dicti fratris Petri Joannis, quae erat scripta per manum divinitatis, sacramentum altaris perdidit suam virtutem et potestatem" (14-15).

[16] "quod Christus alia vice morieretur in persona et spiritu, ad finem quod salvaret animas, quia aliter nulla anima posset per imperpetuum intrare paradisum" (20-21).

[17] "Item asseruit . . . quod oportet ut quicumque voluerint se salvare . . . verbis ipsius Naprous credant, cum sint dicta per virtutem Spiritus Sancti . . . aliter homo non posset salvari; et insuper quod qui non credat eiusdem Naprous verbis, morte morietur aeternali" (22-23).

and finally, send her disciples the gift of her spirit (Reeves 50; Wessley 295). Just as Christ had come to put an end to the Jewish law and the Synagogue, Guglielma had emptied the existing ecclesiastical hierarchy of all meaning and authority, and so the offices of the Church of the third *status* would have to be reformed and occupied anew -- mainly by women. Manfreda would become the first pope of the new spiritual age, and all of her cardinals would be female (Reeves 50; Wessley 294); Andreas aspired to no higher position in the new order than that of the author of the first of four new gospels slated to supersede the Old and New Testaments (Reeves 50; Lambert 202). Before any of this could come to pass, however, Guglielma's cult -- because local and "drawn mainly from the well-to-do" (Reeves 50) -- was quickly and easily rooted out by Church authorities. In 1300, the Inquisition handed three sectaries over to the secular arm for execution and ordered Guglielma's heretical bones to be exhumed, burned, and the ashes spread (Lambert 199-201; Wessley 302).

Other strains of apocalyptic Joachimism were so not so easily put down. The Franciscans, both moderate and immoderate, persisted for a long time in the belief that Antichrist was about to come and that their order would play a special role in the spiritual third *status*. Meanwhile, the Augustinian friars began to suspect that they, and not the followers of Francis, were to lead the Church into or act as catalysts of the new age. By the mid-fourteenth century, the Augustinian house at York had acquired a number of works attributed to Joachim or to his later disciples (Reeves 53), and by the beginning of the sixteenth century, a "distinctive little Augustinian circle devoted to the serious study of prophecy" and especially of Joachim's theories had developed in the order at large (54). The group was based in Venice and centred around a friar of San Cristophora della Pace, Silvestro Meuccio, who began printing the works of Joachim and of his followers (54). Silvestro's interest in and particular interpretation of Joachim becomes clear in his edition of the *Expositio magni prophete Joachim in librum beati Cyrilli*, where he claims that "a picture of the future Angelic Pope is represented in Augustinian friar habit" (trans. in Reeves 55).

Other groups, especially the newly-founded order of Jesuits and (rather unexpectedly) the Protestant reformers, followed the Franciscans and Augustinians in their example, and claimed that they were the new spiritual brotherhood(s) responsible for bringing in the final *status*. Jesuit commentators, though reluctant (openly) to identify themselves with these "future" spiritual men, saw a definite parallel between Joachim's prophetic vision and their own evangelical "sense of mission" (Reeves 121). Daniel Papebroch, the Jesuit Bollandist,[18] maintained that Joachim's predicted new order would combine "the activity of Martha with the quietude of Mary," would resuscitate "the *Spiritualis Intelligentia* of the Scriptures from the tomb of sterile scholasticism," and would evangelize the "barbarians and [combat] Antichrist in the heretics" (Reeves 121) -- in much the same way as, coincidently, his own order did. In the meantime, the Jesuits' Protestant opponents were fascinated and encouraged by Joachim's end-of-the-eleventh century claim that Antichrist had already been born in Rome, which they took to mean that the Roman Church itself was Antichrist (136). It was suggested that Luther was the *Papa Angelicus* who was to oppose Antichrist and succeed the carnal pope as the leader of the new Protestant and spiritual age (138). However, any notion of a new, eternal evangel was considered exceedingly scandalous and blasphemous by the Protestants, as was the notion that the *status* inaugurated by Christ could be succeeded by one of greater perfection (137). Thus, Protestantism both exploited (in those places where they appear to be proto-reformist) and condemned (as the greatest example of Catholic exegetical chicanery) the prophecies and historical analyses of Joachim of Fiore.

Yet within even the post-Reformation Protestant Church, heretical Joachimist or Joachimist-like claims continued to be made. In a particularly interesting mid-seventeenth century case examined by the Winchester parson, Humphrey Ellis, a man named William Franklin alleged that his physical body had been destroyed and replaced by Christ's spiritual, glorified body (Luxon 1).

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[18] The Bollandists were an association of Jesuits responsible for the compilation of the *Acta Sanctorum* (after Jean de Bolland, the editor of the first five volumes).

This second, strange spiritual "Incarnation," as Franklin and his disciple Mary Gadbury insisted, had of necessity brought about the end of the Old and New Testaments, for now that the substance expressed in and through the Scriptures had been manifested, the rest "was but Types and Shadows" (qtd. in Luxon 20). By adhering to the Bible, Ellis and his fellow (hostile) judges foolishly based "their faith upon tropologies, analogies, and allegories, receiving god's promises by way of hermeneutics rather than directly from the Spirit now speaking and acting in Franklin's glorified flesh" (21). Ellis countered that Franklin and Gadbury, in an act of either conscious theatrical impersonation or in a state of gross self-delusion, had "allegorized themselves into biblical characters," most notably Christ (21). In the first case, Franklin accuses Ellis of clinging to that which is meaningless and dead, while in the second, Ellis accuses Franklin and Woodward of not recognizing that it is they who are without significance and thus mere shadows, types, or characters in a play.

5. Allegory and the Dead Letter / Law: Christ as Heretic

On the subject of Joachim's third *status* or age, Marjorie Reeves writes:

> To the orthodox the most unpalatable part of this Joachimist doctrine was the belief that the future would transcend the past -- a claim that so easily passed into arrogance. In Inquisitorial proceedings a major accusation against Joachites was the claim to greater perfection than Christ and the Apostles, yet the Joachite was almost driven into this extreme position for it was in the nature of the 'myth' that the future must transcend the past. (58)

Transcendence requires the death (literal or figural) of the thing transcended -- of Franklin's physical body, of the second *status* of the Son, or of Holy Scripture. This is the "nature of the [Joachimist] myth," and, as discussed in chapter two, the nature of orthodox allegorical or spiritual interpretation.

Because Old Testament type or figure was fulfilled and negated in New Testament antitype or "spiritual truth," the Christian could, theoretically speaking, achieve salvation without reference or recourse to the Old Testament at all -- however, it was considered heresy to state so in public. Perhaps this is because such a statement establishes yet another dangerous precedent, for should it be openly acknowledged that the types of the Old Testament had become as empty, as fragmentary, as ruined as had the Jew and his Synagogue, the believer could very well imagine the New Testament being superseded and replaced in future.

It was recognized that the new law instigated by Christ would itself be replaced at the end of time and was therefore "allegorical" (in the sense of "incomplete"). Although closer to the eternal truths concealed in both heaven and the future, Auerbach writes, the "incarnation and the proclamation of the gospel . . . are not the ultimate fulfillment, but themselves a promise of the end of time and the true kingdom of God" (58). As does the individual Christian's identity (see chapter one, above), "history . . . remains open and questionable, points to something still concealed" (58); just as the Christian performs himself as *imitatio Christi* (and Butler's subject performs himself or herself as *imitatio geni*), the figural or typological event (in the Old Law or at present) is "enacted according to an ideal model which is a prototype situated in the future and thus far only promised" (59). All history and all identity at present is therefore allegory, is fragmentary and already ruined, and should to a certain degree be read as such. However, there is at the same time a serious danger inherent in this practice of figural reading. Projecting oneself into either the future or the past, one could (as did William Franklin) foolishly allegorize oneself into Scripture. Alternately, one could be tricked (as was Mary Gadbury, as will be the Jews) into accepting a false messiah or Antichrist who claims to fulfill and supplant Old or New Testament type.

Figural reading enables the devil himself to resemble the Messiah, and therefore Antichrist is described as a master of allegory, of deception, and of theatre. Allegorical and theatrical representations are closely related, since in both one thing stands for or signifies another, and prior meanings are supplanted in favour of later ones. Saint Jerome, in his *Dialogue against the Pelagians*, complains (through the character of Atticus) that heretical allegorical interpretation reduces the legitimate practice of biblical exegesis

> to a sort of stage device, which enables the one and the same person to appear on stage as Mars or Venus by a change in his assortment of masks; so that he who had entered the stage in an earlier scene as a rough and bloodthirsty male character is made up in a later scene as a dainty female character. (in *Dogmatic and Polemical Works* 366; bk. 3, ch. 12).

In Chester, Antichrist's depiction of the Saviour, his assumption of the messianic mask, is as much an allegorization as is his explication of biblical texts. Fortunately (according to those "in the know"), his dramatic portrayal is as sloppy and as obviously imperfect as his scriptural exegesis: Elijah denounces the "miracles" Antichrist performs -- the raising of the dead (23.79-80), the inversion of fruit trees (81-86), and his own death and resurrection (93-96) -- as "mervelles thinges . . . shewed . . . through the fyendes crafte" (410-12). They are not divine miracles but "fantasye . . . sorcerye, wytchcraft, and nygromancye" (597-98), or in other words, are miracle's theatrical expression or mere simulation.

Conversely, to those not "in the know," Christ the Messiah can resemble the devil (or at least, one of his heretical minions) and his "authentic" miracles can be (mis)read as mere theatrical simulation. Although Jews elsewhere in the drama stop short of labelling Christ's word and work as "heresy," in the N-Town Passion plays, the Jewish leaders are not at all coy in their use of the term. Here Christ is constantly (obliquely) referred to as a heretic, and is directly accused of being so two or three times. At his very first appearance, Annas, identifying himself as a judge of the law, orders his advisors (and perhaps audience members as well) to identify all possible heretics in their midst so they might be punished:

> I, Annas, be my powere xal comawnde, dowteles:
> Þe lawys of Moyses no man xal denye!
> Hoo excede my comawndement, anon ȝe certefye;
> Yf any eretyk here reyn, to me ȝe compleyn.

For in me lyth þe powere all trewthis to trye.
  And pryncypaly oure lawys -- þo must I susteyn.

ȝef I may aspey þe contrary, no wheyle xal þei reyn,
  But anon to me be browth and stonde present
Before here jewge, wich xal not feyn,
  But aftere here trespace gef hem jugement. (26.167-76)

In nearly the same breath, Annas mentions Jesus of Nazareth "þat oure lawys doth excede" (178), implying that Christ is just one troubling schismatic among many. Caiaphas' language in the same play, though less direct than Annas', is more suggestive -- after boasting that he has chief governance of the law of Moses, he declares: "To seuere ryth and wrong in me is termynable" (216). "Seuere" has two possible meanings here: to distinguish or literally to sever or amputate. As discussed in chapter one, heretics were regularly spoken of as being severed from the Church as corpus Christi and so from the body of believers. Further, their faith was regularly described as being both perverse and perverting (Lubac 1: 153-55), and so it is likely not a coincidence that Caiaphas describes Christ's activities using exactly the same terms. "But þer is on Cryst þat [in] oure lawys is varyable," he proclaims; "He pervert þe pepyl with his prechyng ill" (26.217-18).

Rewfyn, a temporal judge, is more direct in his use of the label "heretic." According to him, Jesus

  is an eretyk and a tretour bolde
 To Sesare and to oure lawe, sertayn,
Bothe in word and in werke, and ȝe beholde;
 He is worthy to dey with mekyl peyn! (26.309-12)

In Play 29, Herod also identifies Christ as a heretic, but dismisses him as an insignificant member of a new "Crystyn" sect founded (he mistakenly believes) by John the Baptist:

Johan þe Baptyst crystenyd Cryst, and so he dede many on;
  Þerfore myself dede hym brynge o dawe [kill].
It is I þat dede hym kylle, I telle ȝou everychon,
  For and he had go forth, he xuld a dystroyd oure lawe. (37-40)

John the Baptist's "Crystyns" have proven somewhat troublesome for Herod, refusing to conform to the laws of Mahound, which he holds near and dear (41-45). As a result, he promises to deal with the heretics by taking notably medieval punitive measures against them:

> ȝef ony Crystyn be so hardy his feyth to denye,
> Or onys to erre ageyns his lawe,
> On gebettys [gallows] with cheynes I xal hangyn hym heye,
> And with wylde hors þo traytorys xal I drawe!
> To kylle a thowsand Crystyn I gyf not an hawe [think nothing of]!
> To se hem hangyn or brent to me is very plesauns;
> To dryvyn hem into doongenys, dragonys to knawe [gnaw],
> And to rend here flesche and bonys onto here sustenauns! (29-36)

Like the medieval inquisitor, Herod vows to sever -- to kill -- all those who break with the laws of his god: "Þoo þat excede his lawys be ony errour, / To þe most xamefullest deth I xal hem dyth!" (60-61). Unlike the medieval inquisitor (but very like the medieval Jew) he vows to do this in the name of the "gloryous Mahownd, my sovereyn savyour" (58).

As a result of Herod and the other Jews' use of the terms "heretic" and "heresy," both designations are rendered subjective and ambiguous. We see a similar effect in the Chester Antichrist: here both terms are used repeatedly by the title character when referring to the Jews before they have accepted him as their messiah (23.87-88), by Antichrist's supporters when referring to the prophets Enoch and Elijah (377-80, 438-39), and finally by the Jewish kings when referring to themselves under Antichrist's rule (590, 597-600). Yet the question of what actually constitutes heresy in Chester remains fairly clear-cut, since Antichrist allegorizes himself into the old law and the Jewish Synagogue and therefore turns back to that which Christianity has already rejected.

In contrast, in the N-Town Passion, the ambiguous use of pejorative terms such as "heretic" and "heresy" is made more complicated by the plays' unrelenting criticism of the medieval English judicial system, both secular and ecclesiastical. According to Lynn Squires and Robert Potter, Christ is in these plays accused, tried, and falsely convicted under both Jewish and recognizably contemporary English Christian law: strong comparisons are drawn between Synagogue, Church, and Christian State by means of both visual cues and procedural similarities. For example, at their first appearance in the Conspiracy, the characters of Annas and Caiaphas are described as being dressed almost exactly alike:

> *Here xall Annas shewyn hymself in his stage beseyn aftyr a busshop of þe hoold lawe in a skarlet gowne, and ouyr þat a blew tabbard furryd with whyte, and a mytere on his hed after þe hoold lawe . . . in þe menetyme Cayphas shewyth himself in his skafhald arayd lych to Annas, savyng his tabbard xal be red furryd with white.* (26.164 s.d., 208 s.d.)

Lynn Squires points out that, despite the stage direction's qualification "*after þe hoold lawe,*" both Annas and Caiaphas appear to be dressed somewhat like fifteenth-century mitred bishops who, because the Papal Inquisition was never allowed on English soil, acted as ecclesiastical judges throughout the Middle Ages (280). Their advisors, in furred hoods and caps, appear similarly "realistic in fifteenth-century terms" (280), evoking -- if not perfectly resembling -- English judges in their dress. The final two participants in the conspiracy against Christ are Rewfyn and Lyon who "represent the common law" (280). They appear "*in ray tabardys furryd, and ray hodys abouth here neckys furryd*" (244 s.d.) -- that is, in striped furred gowns that seem effectively to "identify them as sergeants-at-law" (Squires 280).

Annas, Caiaphas, and the rest of their entourage not only resemble English ecclesiastical judges in their dress, but also in the legal technicalities they face and that in the end seriously constrain their power. As in York, Chester, and Towneley, Annas and Caiaphas cannot legally condemn Christ to death -- Caiaphas tells Pilate, "It is not lefful to vs, ȝe seyn, / No maner man for to slen" (30.97-98). Robert Potter believes that a "fifteenth century audience would have found particular relevance" in the N-Town Jews' consequent elaborate "machinations" to persuade a representative of the secular arm of the government (in this case Pilate) to inflict a punishment not available to religious authorities (because more befitting a secular crime) upon those by whom the Church feels it has been offended. Potter writes:

> since medieval churchmen could not be directly involved in punishments requiring the shedding of blood, they were consequently compelled to seek the co-operation of the King's courts in bringing heretics and other offenders against the church to justice. The process at work in this instance resembles the medieval procedure of *Significavit*, by which a Bishop could apply to the king's chancery for a writ ordering a lay official (e.g. a sheriff) to imprison or punish an offender. (132)

Because the offender in this particular case is Christ and therefore could not be more blameless in the eyes of the audience, the N-Town Passion dramatizes in its courtroom scenes "not merely an object lesson in the weakness of human nature and human justice, but also a deeply corrupt struggle between lay and ecclesiastical power" (132). Potter concludes: "Pilate's eventual decision to condemn Jesus is shown as a craven capitulation of fear of popular upheaval and the threats of Annas and Caiaphas" (132). As Potter suggests, this capitulation would likely not have seemed foreign or antiquated to a fifteenth-century audience accustomed to heresy trials and the public burnings of Lollards.

Lynn Squires is convinced that "Whatever the playwright's intentions" may have been, the N-Town Passion's original audience "could hardly have been blind to [its] persistent and accurate paralleling of the old Judaic law to their present-day law, and of the practices of Jewish rulers to those of their present-day kings" (274); nor could they have missed the plays' "severe criticism of the fifteenth-century legal establishment as a whole -- an establishment which is shown to be prone to bias, to perversion of procedures, to hypocrisy, and to brutality" (283).[19] The final implication appears to be that in a system as corrupt, as evil, and (perhaps it is suggested) as dead and empty as is the Jewish Synagogue, a man as innocent as Christ, the very Son of God, could be accused of heresy, unjustly condemned, and executed. Thus the ambiguity of the label or term "heretic" is not neatly resolved in N-Town as it is in Chester. Not only is the fifteenth-century

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[19] In her article "Treason and Court Language in the York Corpus Christi Plays," Elza Tiner demonstrates that a similar comparison is made in York between old Judaic and fifteenth-century English law. However, Tiner sees no implicit criticism of the English judicial system in this comparison. Rather, she argues that the York Passion sequence directs a message at the spectators -- as potential complainants -- "not only to be law-abiding, but also not to accuse the innocent" (115).

Church dangerously allegorized into its type, the Synagogue, the fifteenth-century heretic is of necessity allegorized into the figure of Jesus Christ. While watching the N-Town Passion plays, English men and women had the uncomfortable experience of watching "themselves try, condemn, and crucify Christ;" they saw Christ die not only "*for* them but also *because* of them -- as a victim of their own courts of law" (273).[20] Given the "current" corruption of the Church and State, the Saviour of the world would be rejected and killed all over again even in a professed Christian nation. For this reason, it could easily be concluded by those audience members sympathetic to the heretics (the Lollards) or by those who themselves held heretical beliefs, that the Catholic Church had become as meaningless and as dead as the Jewish Synagogue, and therefore needed to be renewed. Not all English heretics would have avoided plays such as the N-Town Passion -- after all, the author of the second half of the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* addresses in his work a "half frynde" who defends (and thus likely attends) religious theatre.

6. Maintaining Christ's New Law

In order to retain a Christological centre to history (in opposition to the Joachites) and in order to retain the authority of the Roman Catholic Church (in opposition to all other heretics), theologians were faced with the challenge of simultaneously recognizing present human history as unfulfilled allegory (or theatre) and categorically denying the possibility that the new law established by Christ on Earth could cede to another. Two strategies, on the surface contradictory, were employed. The first, the allegorical or typological interpretation of Scripture, located the present and future in the past and thus denied that any revolutionary transition occurred between the old law and the new. By eliminating the precedent for revolution, typology eliminated the prospect of its repetition. In contrast, when the revolutionary power of Christ's sacrifice was

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recognized, the moment of transition was extended and his Passion became perpetual. Revolution can only upset an established law. For this reason, the age initiated by Christ was depicted as being lawless (because an age of mercy), and his body was portrayed as abject and incomplete.

6.a. The Passion as "Fulfillment"

Because they dramatize the full expanse of Christian history, the cycle plays and collections are particularly well suited to illustrating the timeless quality of God's law. They stage not only type but antitype, not only prophecy but prophecy's fulfillment in past and future events, both terms of which are equally certain since God's entire plan for humanity was formed at the very moment of its creation. The Word is eternal and able to manifest itself at any time; therefore salvation and Last Judgement both figure in Old Testament texts, and sacrament precedes sacrifice in Chester's dramatization of Melchizedek's offering to Abraham. Although the import of such manifestations was not always immediately obvious to those first privileged to witness or record them, their meanings become clear to those who come after, or to those able to observe the unfolding of events from a point outside of time, from the divine viewpoint.

Humankind's eventual salvation and inevitable judgement is first prophesied by Adam, who relates his vision of both advents of the Lord in the Drapers' play in Chester. According to tradition this vision was given him while God removed his rib for the creation of Eve: Adam lay in an ecstatic sleep, during which time his soul was carried to heaven "where it received intimations of divine intention" (Lumiansky and Mills 2: 27, ll. 437-72n.). Describing this vision to his sons Cain and Abel (and, through them, to the audience), Adam reveals God's plan for humankind's redemption. It is obvious that the course of history was set long before the Fall and that Christ's Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Second Coming figured from the very beginning in God's plan for humanity:

> I wott by things that I there see
> that God will come from heaven on hie,
> to overcome the devill soe slee
> and light into my kynde;
> and my blood that hee will wyne
> that I soe lost for my synne;
> a new lawe ther shall begine
> and soe men shall them sure [assure]
> . . . .
> Alsoe I see, as I shall saye,
> that God will come the laste daye
> to deeme mankynde in fleshe verey [true],
> and flame of fyer burninge,
> the good to heaven, the evell to hell.
> Your childrenn this tale yee may tell.
> This sight saw I in paradyce or I fell,
> as laye there sleepinge. (2.449-56, 465-72)

This particular prophecy is not dramatized elsewhere in English medieval drama, but prophet plays or prologues to plays positively abound. At the beginning of the York Annunciation, for example, Doctour cites a number of Old Testament messianic texts relating to Christ's Incarnation, which is the subject of the play to follow; prophecy, then, immediately precedes its own fulfillment. He makes reference to the prophets Amos, Isaiah, Joel, and Jacob in an attempt first to establish the conditions of Christ's birth, emphasizing in particular that the Messiah will be born of a virgin (12.22, 51, 61-64, 88-108), and, second, to prove that Christ's "kyngdom . . . euere is begonne" and "Sall never sese, but dure and dwell" (65-66) -- and thus that Christ's kingdom extends simultaneously into the past and into the future. The remainder of the play effectively demonstrates that these prophets were correct. "Þus of Cristis commyng may we see," Doctour informs the audience, "How sainte Luke spekis in his gospel" (133-34). As the old saying goes, seeing is believing. Both the script of Old Testament prophecy and the script of New Testament history are realized and "proven" true in the short dramatic -- fictive -- performance which follows.

N-Town's prophet play differs from York's in a couple of important ways, yet achieves much the same effect. First of all, it incorporates itself into the structure of *Radix Jesse* or Jesse Root, Christ's iconographic family tree (Spector 2: 432-33). Second, it presents messianic texts and individual professions of faith in the mouths of their original speakers, bringing thirteen Old Testament prophets and thirteen Old Testament kings together on the stage. The prophecies of and prophets Isaiah (1-16), Jeremiah (33-40), Ezekiel (45-48), Micah (53-56), Daniel (61-64), Jonah (69-72), Obadiah (77-80), Habakkuk (85-88), Joel (93-96), Haggai (101-04), Hosea (109-12), Zephania (117-20), and Baruch (125-28) alternate with the personal testimonies of and kings who constitute Christ's ancestral line: David (25-32), Solomon (41-44), Rehoboam (49-52) Abijah (57-60), Asa (65-68), Jehoshaphat (73-76), Joram (81-84), Uzziah (109-12), Jotham (97-100), Ahaz (105-08), Hezekiah (113-16), Manasseh (122-24), and finally Amon (129-36). This particular manner of staging neatly and concisely illustrates God's vision of and plan for human history. The linear progression of time is emphasized in the succession of kings, while the unity of purpose underlying time and history is stressed through the words of the prophets and more specifically through the object of their discourse, Jesus Christ. The audience is also allowed the momentary privilege of seeing history from the divine viewpoint as generations of human beings are impossibly brought together and the diachronic, the genealogical family tree, is miraculously expressed synchronically.

Again, a similar effect is achieved in the incomplete Towneley Play of the Prophets. This play features the prophecies of Moses, David, Sibyl, and Daniel, and covers the span of time from the Creation and Fall (113-14, 169-71, 217-23) to the Incarnation and Ministry of Christ (19-30, 112, 115-44, 172-74, 223-34) and finally to his Second Coming (175-216). This in itself is not especially remarkable, though it does effectively (by compressing linear time into the singular moment of prophecy) illustrate the Word's a-temporality; neither is its presentation of the prophets "themselves" unusual, since N-Town employs the very same technique. In Towneley, however, there is the rather striking inclusion of Moses' Ten Commandments in among the prophecies (31-90), something not seen elsewhere in the drama. The fulfillment of the old law in the new is in this way evoked along with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in Christ. Despite appearances, a fundamental unity underlies both the Mosaic and Christian codes -- the former extends into the future, while the latter may be traced (like wine under the appearance of water) into Christianity's Judaic past.

N-Town dramatizes this allegorical fulfillment of the law, not in its play of the prophets, but in Moses' "historical" presentation of the Ten Commandments to the Israelites in Play 6. Here, the unity of the old and new laws is illustrated by infusing the ancient commandments with particularly Christian (or spiritual) and even medieval significance. As he presents and explains the commandments to the "Israelites" (really the audience), Moses follows a Christian division of the law first established by Augustine in the fourth century (Spector 2: 430, ll. 61-64n.):

> The preceptys þat taught xal be
> Be wretyn in þese tablys tweyn.
> In the fyrst ben wretyn thre
> That towch to God, þis is serteyn.
> In þe secund tabyl be wretyn ful pleyn
> Þe tother vij, þat towch mankende. (59-64)

Moses then goes on to explicate the specific meaning of each precept in what "essentially constitutes a versified sermon employing several conventional motifs that appear in [medieval] homiletic literature and Latin commentary" (Spector 2: 429). For example, Moses does not mention the worship of idols when explaining the prescription against false gods, even though, in the familiar biblical story, he returns from the mountain to find the Israelites worshipping a golden calf. Instead, he warns the audience against an idolatrous attachment to worldly goods and wealth -- compare this to the *Lay Folk's Catechism*'s firm declaration, "Couetyse ys worschepyng of fals goddys" (qtd. in Spector 2: 430, ll. 66a-82n.). In like manner, Moses' explication of the third commandment -- "remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy" -- completely ignores the literal sense of God's law or command (not to work on the Sabbath) in favour of a more spiritual or allegorical (and yet practical) interpretation. "Kepe þe well fro *synfull* dede" on the Sabbath, Moses warns the audience, "And care not gretly for rych aray" (101-02, emphasis added). This interpretation of the third commandment resembles that offered in the "X mandata" found in BL MS Harl. 665: "Leve servyle werkes and mych a-ray; / Thys ys the tryd comaundement" (qtd. in Spector 2: 430, ll. 98a-114n.).

According to Moses' subsequent explication of the fourth commandment (the first to pertain to human social relationships), "honour your father and your mother," believers are required to honour and obey not only their physical parents but, anachronistically, their spiritual parents, and so their parish priest and the Holy Catholic Church itself:

> Includyd also I fynde in þis
> Thi gostly fadyr and modyr þerto.
> To þi gostly fadyr evyr reuerens do;
> Þi gostly modyr is Holy Cherch.
> These tweyn saue þi sowle fro woo;
> Euyr them to wurchep loke þat þu werch. (125-30)

Moses, or rather the playwright, reads the Church back into *Synagoga* and the Catholic back into the Jewish priest. Other N-Town plays and sequences, specifically the originally separate "Mary Play,"[21] do much the same thing. For example, in Play 9, the Presentation of Mary, a "Jewish" *Episcopus* (Bishop) tells the three-year-old Mary that she must "Love God þe Sone [to whom she has not yet given birth] for he gevyth wysdam" (180); he then instructs her, "love þin evyn-[fellow] Crystyn as þiself withowtyn ende" (185), blessing her "In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti" ("in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," 217). In Play 10, *Episcopus* and his ministers not only sing the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* (Come Creator Spirit, 115), they sing the sequence for the festival of the Trinity, *Benedicta sit beata Trinitas* (Blessed be the Holy Trinity, 302), and the "Alma chorus," which both formed part of the English nuptual

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[21] This sequence is extracted from the collection and, as much as possible, reconstructed in Peter Meredith's *The Mary Play from the N.Town Manuscript*.

Mass (334; Spector 2: 450, l. 334n.). The Jewish Temple and Mary, the Jewish Virgin, could not possibly appear or act more Catholic -- or more medieval.

This allegorization of the Church and of Christian rite back into the Temple and into Jewish rite is epitomized (and explained) in Chester's dramatization of Melchizedek's offering to Abraham, found in Play 4. After Abraham's defeat of the four kings and recovery of his nephew Lot (Gen. 14.1-16), Melchizedek, King of Salem, brings the triumphant warrior a gift of bread and wine. In response, Abraham gives Melchizidek one tenth of the spoils he has gained over the course of his battle. The Expositor explains the significance of both men's actions:

> This present, I saye veramente,
> signifieth the newe testamente
> that nowe is used with good intente
> throughout all Christianitye.
>
> In the owld lawe, without leasinge [falsehood],
> when these too good men were livinge,
> of beastes were there offeringe
> and eke there sacramente.
> But synce Christe dyed one roode-tree,
> in bred and wyne his death remenber wee;
> and at his laste supper our mandee
> was his commandemente.
>
> But for this thinge used should bee
> afterwardes, as nowe done wee,
> in signification -- as leeve you mee --
> Melchysedeck did soe.
> And teathinges-makinge [tithing], as you seene here,
> of Abraham begonnen were. (117-34)

By the Expositor's reckoning, the "Father of heaven" may be understood in the figure of Abraham (137) and the "pryest to his [God's] paye" in the figure of the King of Salem (139). Saint Ambrose, in *De mysteriis*, goes one step further, identifying Melchizedek with Christ himself and offering the entire incident as proof that "the sacraments of the Church are more ancient than those of the synagogue" (in *Theological and Dogmatic Works* 21; ch. 8). "For the synagogue took its beginning from the law of Moses," Ambrose writes, "but Abraham was far earlier" (21).

6.b. The Passion as Extended Revolution

This notion of type and fulfillment, of eternal Word manifested in word and deed, established Christ, the New Testament, and the Catholic Church as the forerunners of the Jews, Mosaic law, and the Synagogue. However, this reading of history did not entirely rule out the possibility of a later, greater manifestation on earth of the eternal Word or Signified, which would still achieve perfect wholeness only at the end of time. Even without the paradigm of Christ's Crucifixion as revolution, shades of fulfillment more excellent than, not Christ the Word but Christ in his past incarnation, could be imagined, especially since human history was and is represented as a progression, and since knowledge comes directly from the eternal "truth" or signified, not from the ephemeral signifier. Guglielma's followers were convinced that she was the incarnation of the Holy Spirit; they then read their conviction back into the Scriptures and into Joachim of Fiore's theories, which by then were ubiquitous.

It is perhaps for this reason that many popular medieval representations of the Passion and of the sacrament of the Eucharist work against the tendency (described at the beginning of this chapter) to stabilize the second *status* initiated by Christ. Instead, they present that *status* -- characterized by martyrdom and mercy -- less as an established new "law" or allegorical fulfillment of the old than as an extended moment of transition between two regimes. The effect remains the same: the primacy or centrality of Christ's role in history is preserved as is the validity of the Catholic Church. However, because the current age itself constitutes perpetual revolution and change, it cannot be superseded. Christ suffers continually yet does not die and so is not rendered obsolete, but neither is he restored to perfect wholeness. The certainty and comfort gained for the individual believer in the original stabilization of the second *status* is lost, but, ironically, the possibility of further revolution that that stabilization entailed is eliminated. Christ's and his Church's current *status* thus becomes more secure.

As discussed above, Old Testament prophecy was offered as clear evidence that God's plan for creation was fully formed from the beginning of time, and so that Christ's salvic role was determined before humankind was even in need of salvation or restoration. However, at the same time, representations of the so-called "Parliament of Heaven" suggested that the Incarnation and Passion were the products of an adaptable Trinity willing to listen to the arguments and exhortations of those beneath it and able to modify its blueprint of human history accordingly. These representations depict the process by and precise moment at which God the Son is chosen to be the redeemer of humankind. Because the Creation and Fall of Adam and Eve antedates this moment by a considerable margin, God's plan for creation appears only ever half-formed, or at best subject to external and internal forces.

According to Ruth Harvey's summary of this tradition, depictions of the Parliament were loosely based on Psalm 85.10 (84.11 Vulgate), "Mercy and truth have met together; justice and peace have kissed each other" (xxviii).[22] Bernard was the first to explicate and expand on this text in a twelfth-century sermon for the Feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin (xxviii; *PL* 183: 383-90); this sermon then became a source for the authors of the late thirteenth-century *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and the short sermon entitled *Rex et famulus* (xxviii). In their turn, these two works inspired numerous late medieval English texts. The debate between the four daughters of God in *Castle of Perseverance* has already been discussed; other versions can be found in Nicholas Love's *Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* (which is a translation and adaptation of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*), in Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady* (Harvey xxvii), in the anonymous *Courte of Sapyence* (Harvey xxviii), in *The Charter of the Holy Ghost*, and in two "closely related manuscripts, Trinity College, Cambridge, B. 2. 18, and Trinity College, Dublin, 423" (Spector 1: xliv). *Piers Plowman*'s Passus 18 (20 in the C-text) also contains a debate of sorts between Peace and Mercy, Justice and Truth, but avoids the problematic implications of a heavenly parliament (with the division of power, however slight, that this implies) by making the daughters of God mere witnesses to (and not advocates of) the Harrowing of Hell.

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[22] "Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi, iustitia et pax osculatae sunt" (Vulgate).

Yet another version of the Parliament has found its way into the N-Town manuscript and so into the same collection of plays containing the apparently antithetical Jesse Root. Conflated with the Salutation and Conception, the Parliament of Heaven depicts not only the four daughters of God but the Virtues, Angels, and Archangels (11.33-40) interceding on humankind's behalf before the Holy Trinity, presenting arguments both for and against humanity's restoration to divine grace. These arguments, both pro and con, can be divided into three basic categories: those appealing to binding contractual statements previously made by God, those appealing to the circumstances surrounding and nature of humanity's Fall, and those appealing to what can only be described as God the Father's, Son's, and Spirit's democratic ideological leanings. *Virtutes*, a representative of the first angelic order (Spector 2: 453-54, ll. 33-48n.), initiates the entire debate by asking God to have pity on man since "Patryarchys and prophetys han mad supplycacyon"(35). To this (in itself rather insignificant) lobby the angels then add their own requests for "Mercy, mercy, mercy" (40), making it quite apparent that an overwhelming majority of the heavenly Parliament favours humankind's restoration. This prompts Mercy to declare: "All hefne and erthe crye for mercy; / Mesemyth þer xuld be non excepcyon [exception or objection], / Ther prayers ben offeryd so specyally" (78-80). As it turns out, however, her declaration is a bit premature and a bit presumptuous.

For "exepcyon" is taken or made by both Justice and Truth, and the debate is on. Truth begins her argument against salvation by appealing to what God the Father originally said "Whan Adam had synnyd": "þu seydest þore [there, then]," she reminds him, "Þat he xulde deye and go to helle" (61-62). If God were "to blysse hym [Adam] to resstore" (63), he would be contradicting himself, for "Twey contraryes mow not togedyr dwelle!" (64). In answer, Mercy cites a few statements of her own, reminding God, "þu seyest endlessly þat mercy þu hast kept for man" (83), and "Thu seyst, 'Veritas mea et Misericordia mea cum ipso'" ("My truth and my mercy are the same," 85). "It is seyd" Justice counters, "ȝe know wel þis of me, / Þat þe ryghtwysnes of God hath no diffynicyon [limit]" (99-100). "Lerne, and ȝe lyst," Mercy rebutts, "þis is Goddys lore [teaching]: / Þe mercy of God is withowtyn ende" (111-12).

These apparently inconsistent, even self-contradictory, divine statements constitute only half of the daughters' arguments. The horrendous nature of the crime itself, Justice maintains, should also be taken into consideration before parole is granted:

> Man offendyd hym þat is endles,
> Therfore his endles punchement may nevyr sese.
>   Also he forsoke his makere þat made hym of clay,
> And the devyl to his maystyr he ches. (92-95)

To make matters worse, "As wyse as is God he wolde a be, / This was þe abhomynablyl presumpcyon" (97-98). "Xulde he be savyd?" Justice asks; "Nay, nay, nay!" (96). Rather, let "He þat sore synnyd ly stylle in sorwe" (102). In reply, Mercy suggests that, the degree of the crime notwithstanding, there were mitigating circumstances that contributed to the Fall of humanity. She therefore asks that her sister and God himself "consyder þe frelnes of mankende" (110) before passing judgement. As *Virtutes* mentions earlier, it was actually Lucifer who first "mevyd man to be so contraryous" (43). To his credit, "man repentyd" while Lucifer still "in his obstynacye doth dwelle" (44).

The four daughters finally submit the case to Wisdom's (Christ's) judgement (121-36). He sides with Peace and Mercy, explaining that two deaths -- that of Adam and that of another, as yet unspecified individual -- will be necessary to ensure each of his four sisters' continued existence and well-being:

This I deme, to ses ȝoure contraversy.
If Adam had not deyd, peryschyd had Ryghtwysnes,
And also Trewth had be lost þerby.
Trewth and Ryght wolde chastyse foly.
3iff another deth come not, Mercy xulde perysch;
Þan Pes were exyled fynaly.
So tweyn dethis must be, ȝow fowre to cherysch. (138-44)

Certain conditions apply to this second salvic death, the most important being that he who suffers must be completely without sin "Þat helle may holde hym be no lawe, / But þat he may pas at hese lyberté" (147-48). The Son tells his sisters to go search heaven and earth for such a one, which they do to no avail: Truth reports that on earth "þer kan non be fownde / Þat is of o day byrth withowte synne / Nor to þat deth wole be bownde [ready and willing]" (154-55), while Mercy admits that in heaven "þer is non of þat charyté / Þat for man wole suffre a deddly wounde" (158-59). Peace then humbly suggests that God himself should undertake the task -- "He þat ȝaff þis counsell, lete hym ȝeve þe comforte alon" (167) -- which advice the Son immediately accepts, calling a "counsel of þe Trinité" to decide "Which of vs xal man restore" (171-72). God the Father is of the opinion that the Son should be responsible for humankind's salvation since in "wysdam . . . man was made thore, / And in wysdam was his temptacyon" (173-74). This makes sense to the Son as well, but further details of the plan remain to be resolved and finalized. "[H]e þat xal do þis must be both God and man," Christ muses; "Lete me se how I may were þat wede [garment] . . . " (177-78).

The import of all this is that God is making up his plan for creation as he goes along and that, therefore, within this particular scheme of history, an atemporal truth does not determine type but type determines any one of a number of possible future events or anti-types. It is perhaps for this reason that, in the N-Town Parliament of Heaven, prophets are twice referred to as making "supplycacyon" (35, 53), but never as prophesying. Wine does not precede water in this case, but water allows for wine -- or perhaps for vinegar or for unfermented grape juice. Scripture remains unfinished not only because its truth has not yet been manifested, but because its truth has (anarchically) not yet been determined.

Elsewhere, the liminal nature of the law and of both Scriptures is emphasized in their close association with the perpetually bleeding, though glorified, body of Christ. Conversely, Christ's suffering, incomplete body is offered as a text to be read as law. "The greatest book is the incarnate Son," writes Garnier de Rochefort, "because just as the written word is united with the vellum, so the Word of the Father was united with the Flesh through [Christ's] assumption of humanity."[23] Jordan of Saxony, writing to the nun Diana of Andalò, encourages her to take and read "the book which is ever in your mind's eye, the book of life, the volume of law undefiled, converting the soul." This book is not the Bible -- or rather is the Bible in another form. "This law undefiled, since it cleanses defilement, is charity," Jordan continues, "which you will find beautifully written, when you look on Jesus our Saviour, stretched out on the Cross as a parchment, written in purple, illuminated with his holy blood" (trans. in Smalley 283).

Medieval Catholicism's fascination with the wounds of Christ has already been discussed in my first chapter; the point here is to suggest that the bleeding wounds of Christ and their association with the words of Scripture emphasize the perpetually present nature of the Crucifixion and thus of the moment of transition between old and new law. In a popular prayer which very often accompanied representations of Christ as the Man of Sorrows or Image of Pity, *Adoro te Jesu Christe*, the individual devotee is encouraged to recite:

> I adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, hanging upon the Cross, and bearing on your head a crown of thorns . . . . I adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, wounded upon the cross, drinking vinegar and gall . . . . I adore you Lord Jesus, placed in the tomb, laid in myrrh and spices . . . . I adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, descending into hell, liberating the captives . . . . I adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, rising from the dead, ascending into heaven and sitting on the right hand of the Father. (trans. in Duffy 239)

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[23] "Liber maximus est Filius incarnatus, quia sicut per scripturam verbum unitur pelli, ita per assumptionem hominis Verbum Patris unitum est carni" (*De nativitate Domini*, in *PL* 205: 610; qtd. in Lubac 1: 192n.).

In the individual believer's imagination. Christ is pictured in the act of suffering for humankind. not only over and over again, but perpetually; the moment of his Crucifixion is extended to the very end of time so that believers might tap into its power, might strengthen their faith by repeatedly observing the revolutionary "moment" of their salvation. In a sense, Christ offers his wounded body as a written *Charter* or contract documenting his Passion and therefore the terms of humankind's redemption (Rubin, "The Body" 21-22; *Corpus Christi* 306-08). Yet the *Charter* is as much a continuous experience as a reiteration, for the "document / body relives its past sufferings as it retells them, feeling pain, thirst, and the burning of wounds" (Rubin, "The Body" 22-23).

In performance, medieval dramatizations of the Passion repeat it as history even as they form a temporary connection with it as a current event. In all of the extant versions, Christ's wounds remain visible and continue to bleed from the moment of the Resurrection (Towneley 26.237) through the appearance to Thomas (York 41.175; N-Town 38.379-82; Chester 19.246-47; Towneley 28.570) and Christ's Ascension (Chester 20.129-31; Towneley 29.256) right up until the Last Judgement (York 47.245-75; Chester 24.385-436; Towneley 30.75-76, 576-606) -- and thus, in "real" time, from year to year, from performance to performance. Every play or sequence has its more gruesome moments;[24] however, Chester boasts a particularly graphic and spectacular illustration of the Saviour's continued suffering which warrants mention. At one point in the Judgement play, Christ, after commanding the audience to observe his body carefully, "sends out [a stream of] blood from his side":

> Behould nowe, all men! Looke on mee
> and see my blood freshe owt flee
> that I bleede on roode-tree
> for your salvatyon.

---

[24] For example, in N-Town, Thomas reveals to the audience more, perhaps, than they really wish to know. He admits, "I trustyd nevyr he levyd, þat deed was on a tre / Tyll þat his herteblood dede renne in my sleve" (38.379-80).

Tunc emittet sanguinem de latere eius. (24.425- 428 s.d.)

The effect was probably intended to simulate iconographic representations of Christ in which he is simultaneously the celebrant and the sacrament of the Eucharist (see Bynum *Fragmentation* 111, 207). Christ's use of the present tense is interesting here, since it suggests that he remains (if not visibly, then not entirely metaphorically) hanging on the cross. He repeats this use a few lines later as if in emphasis -- "I bleede [not 'bled']," he declares, "to bringe you to blys" (431).[25]

Earlier in the same speech, Christ offers three reasons for his continued "fleshliness" and therefore extended salvic suffering. At the end of time, at the Last Judgement, Christ explains, his pitiful state will stand as an awful reminder to the Jews of "how unkynd they them beare" toward their Saviour (401). At the same time, the sight of his battered body will serve as a reward, a vision of "blys," to all those who succesfully "avoyded wyckednes" during their lifetimes (406-07) and remained faithful to him. However, before Final Judgement, from the period of time from Christ's Ascension to the final resurrection of the dead, Christ's suffering, incarnate form served (or serves) quite another purpose. He explains:

> On cause was this, certeynlye,
> that to my Father almightie
> at my Assentyon offer might I
> this blood, prayinge a boone [favour]:
> that hee of you should have mercye
> and more gracyous be therebye
> when you had synned horryblie,
> not takinge vengeance to soone [quickly]. (389-96)

Christ's continuous bleeding acts as a delay in or postponement of humanity's inevitable judgement and encourages the anarchic suspension of justice through mercy. It also, in the words of Origen, reflects the incomplete, abject status of the corpus Christi or Church -- not only here on earth, but also in heaven before the restoration or amputation of every last human being to or from the body. Explicating the text, "Drink no wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons, when you enter the tent of meeting . . ." (Lev. 10.9), Origen writes:

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[25] Readings of this passage differ in the various manuscripts of the cycle. Present tense is used in the Huntington manuscript and perhaps also in Additional 10305 and Harley 2013 (the spelling is "blede," which strongly suggests present but could also indicate past tense). The past tense is definitely used in Bodley 175 and Harley 2124, and Lumiansky and Mills take this to be their preferred reading (2: 369, l. 427n., l. 431n.). However, they themselves concede that "either tense would give satisfactory sense" (2: 369, l. 431n.).

> My Saviour grieves even now about my sins. My Saviour cannot rejoice as long as I remain in perversion. Why cannot he do this? Because he himself is 'an intercessor for our sins with the Father'. . . . How can he, who is an intercessor for my sins, drink the 'wine' of joy, when I grieve him with my sins? . . . He who 'took our wounds upon himself' and suffered for our sakes as a healer of souls and bodies: should he regard no longer the festering wounds? Thus it is that he waits until we should be converted, in order that we may follow in his footsteps and he rejoice 'with us' and 'drink wine with us in the Kingdom of his Father'. . . . We are the ones who delay his joy by our negligence toward our own lives . . . .
>
> But let us not ignore the fact that it is said not only of Aaron that 'he drank no wine,' but also of his sons when they approach the sanctuary. For the apostles too have not yet received their joy: they likewise are waiting for me to participate in their joy. So it is that the saints who depart from here do not immediately receive the full reward of their merits, but wait for us, even if we delay, even if we remain sluggish. They cannot know perfect joy as long as they grieve over our transgressions and weep for our sins . . . . Do you see, then? Abraham is still waiting to attain perfection. Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets are waiting for us in order to attain the perfect blessedness together with us. This is the reason why judgment is kept a secret, being postponed until the Last Day. It is 'one body' which is waiting for justification, 'one body' which rises for judgment. 'Though there are many members, yet there is only one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I do not need you.' Even if the eye is sound and fit for seeing, if the other members were lacking, what would the joy of the eye be?
>
> You will have joy when you depart from this life if you are a saint. But your joy will be complete only when no member of your body is lacking to you. For you too will wait, just as you are awaited. But if you, who are a member, do not have perfect joy as long as a member is missing, how much more must our Lord and Saviour, who is the head and origin of this body, consider it an incomplete joy if he is still lacking certain of his members? . . . Thus he does not want to receive his perfect glory without you: that means, not without his people which is 'his body' and 'his members.' (from *Leviticum homiliae*, trans. in Ratzinger 185)

Christ suspends his own completion -- along with that of every saint in heaven -- and thus apparently extends the moment of his glorious revolution. However, as Artaud warns in *Heliogabalus*, every anarchist secretly craves the crown, and every fascist tyrant is at bottom only an anarchist. Mercy, like the theatre, will have its double.

Conclusion

Achieving Stasis and Transcendence: Final Judgement

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry suggests that God's invisible, disembodied spirit relies on human flesh and meat to reveal its very existence and thus to create and enforce religious belief. She states succinctly in prose what Artaud repeatedly attempted to communicate in his poetry:

> God's invisible presence is asserted, made visible, in the perceivable alterations He brings about in the human body: in the necessity of human labor and the pains of childbirth, in a flood that drowns, in a plague that descends on a house . . . . scenes of hurt . . . tend to occur in the context of disbelief and doubt: the invisible (and hence periodically disbelieved-in) divine power has a visible substantiation in the alterations in body tissue it is able to bring about. Man can only be created once, but once created, he can be endlessly modified; wounding re-enacts the creation because it re-enacts the power of alteration that has its first profound occurrence in creation. (183)

"[T]he body in its most intense presence becomes the substantiation of the most disembodied reality" (194), and its fundamental incompletion is effectively demonstrated in its infinite re-creation. Bodies on earth can sicken and be healed, can be punished and rewarded. Christ's Incarnation only slightly modifies this equation, simply providing God with his own, continually accessible body on or through which to substantiate himself (215). For this reason, among others, Christ continues to bleed.

However, Christ's body will no longer bleed after the Last Judgement; his wounds will finally be stopped with the reincorporation of every last believer into his heavenly community of saints. At this time, according to Mechtild of Magdeburg, his wounds will heal into scars resembling rose petals (Bynum *Resurrection* 338), and his terrible suffering desire will at last cease.

In conjunction with this final sealing of the social corpus Christi, the individual Christian will experience the complete transformation of his own liminal, plague-ridden, mutable-because-fleshly body into the whole, unchanging, glorified spirit-body of heaven. There will be no division between body and soul after the general Resurrection; in Caroline Walker Bynum's words, there will be no "soul-self to which a house or garment or tool [is] unaccountably or adventitiously added, nor even a soul-self expressing that self in body" but a "body-soul-self," a perfect, inextricable union (*Resurrection* 254). According to Augustine, this self will not only enjoy the possibility of not dying (*posse non mori*) and possibility of not changing (*posse non commutari*) experienced (briefly) by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but will delight in the impossibility of dying (*non posse mori*) and impossibility of changing (*non posse mutari*) that will characterize all subjects and objects in heaven after Judgement (Bynum *Resurrection* 97). Glorified bodies will resemble crystal, gold, ivory, or precious jewels in their hardness.[1] Christ, in the N-Town Judgement, calling his servants to rise from the dead, thus commands:

> All þo fowle wyrmys from ȝow falle.
>   With my ryght hand I blysse ȝow here.
> My blyssynge burnyschith ȝow as bryght as berall;
>   As crystall clene it clensyth ȝow clere,
>   All fylth from ȝow fade. (42.44-48)

To a certain extent, the post-resurrection body resembles the dying Artaud's lost body of wood[2] and desired body of bone. At the end of his life, Artaud suffered from cancer, a modern equivalent of leprosy as a disease of abjection since it arises within the body, is comprised of the body's own cells, and thus obscures the distinction between the subject and the object that invades it, threatening its very life. Betrayed by his own flesh, by that which distinguished him from spirit and allowed him to resist both God and the myth of Idea or meaning, Artaud came to associate material hardness with invulnerability and purity (Greene *Poet* 192), and finally dismissed the body's soft and penetrable meat with loathing and disgust. In "To Have Done with the Judgement of God" he writes:

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[1] Mechtild of Magdeburg, the German mystic, had "a vision of John the Evangelist in heaven" as a "reclining crystal figure" (Bynum *Resurrection* 10); other writers described post-resurrection bodies (especially those of martyrs) as resembling "gold and jewels tempered in the furnace" (50). Guerric of Igny wrote in his twelfth-century "First Sermon for the Annunciation": "We dwell to be sure in houses of clay, but what are clay by reason of their material, come to be of ivory through the virtue of continence" (trans. in Bynum 171). In *Scivias* (bk. 3, vision 8, ch. 8), Hildegard of Bingen maintains that the body "is stabilized and hardened in glory," that "in heaven, it is gold or a pearl or a finely cut gem" (Bynum 162).

[2]

> I was an old carved-up tree
> who didn't eat,
> didn't drink
> didn't breathe . . . . ("You have to begin with a will to live," trans. Rattray 216)
>
> [J'étais un vieil arbre à rainures
> qui ne mangeait pas,
> ne buvait pas
> ne respirait pas . . . .] ("Il fallait d'abord avoir envie de vivre," qtd. in Greene *Thought* 138)

> To exist one need only let oneself be,
> but to live,
> one must be someone,
> to be someone,
> one must have a BONE,
> not be afraid to show the bone,
> and to lose the meat in the process. (trans. Weaver 560; see also Greene, *Poet* 177).[3]

Like Scarry, Artaud suspects that meat conspires with God and spirit and mind, providing the medium for their expression and substantiation. Man is held in subjection to his own mutable, imprintable, easily infected and infiltrated flesh, and is in this way prevented from achieving his desired, revolutionary ossification:

> When the bedrock was eaten by the bone,
> that the mind was gnawing from behind,
> the mind opened its mouth too wide
> and received in the back
>   of the head
> a blow that dried up its bones . . . . (trans. Weaver "Here Lies" 549)[4]

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[3]
> Pour exister il suffit de se laisser aller à être,
> mais pour vivre,
> il faut être quelqu'un,
> pour être quelqu'un,
> il faut avoir un OS,
> ne pas avoir peur de montrer l'os,
> et de perdre la viande en passant. ("Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu," *OC* 13: 83-84)

[4]
> Quand le tuff fut mangé par l'os,
> que l'esprit rongeait par derrière,
> l'esprit ouvrit la bouche en trop
> et il reçut dans le derrière
>   de la tête
> un coup à dessécher ses os . . . . ("Ci-gît," *OC* 12: 98)

God, spirit, and mind plumb the very depths of flesh and meat

> to make us
> a little more disgusted with ourselves,
> being this unusable body,
> made out of meat and crazy sperm,
> this body hung, from before the lice,
> sweating on the impossible table
> of heaven
> its callous odor of atoms,
> its alcoholic smell of abject
> *detritus* . . . . (trans. Weaver 540)[5]

As discussed above in chapter one, the body is always incomplete, ingesting or inhaling the other into the same, excreting or exhaling the same out into the other; this leaves it completely open to infection by disease and perpetually unfinished. Wholeness can only be achieved, paradoxically, in death, and even then the corpse begins to disintegrate, to decompose and to be digested. Thus, as long as man prefers meat "to the earth of bones" (trans. Weaver, "To Have Done" 560),[6] he will remain subject to the spirit and to God, who have a vested interest in keeping him soft, pliable, and incomplete. Any revolt against meat constitutes a revolt against God and vice versa. It is for this reason that Artaud encourages his fellow man "to remake his anatomy," explaining:

> Man is sick because he is badly constructed.
> We must make up our minds to strip him bare in order to scrape off that
> animalcule that itches him mortally,

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[5]

> pour nous
> dégoûter un peu plus de nous,
> était ce corps inemployable,
> fait de viande et de sperme fou,
> ce corps pendu, d'avant les poux,
> suant sur l'impossible table
> du ciel
> son odeur calleuse d'atome,
> sa rogomeuse odeur d'abject
> *détritus* . . . . ("Ci-gît," *OC* 12: 78)

[6] "que la terre des os" (*OC* 13: 84).

god,
and with god
his organs. (trans. Weaver 570)[7]

By reconstructing the body, Artaud hopes finally to achieve the completion and consummation of the subject as a whole. Once the individual is equated with and contained within his or her own body of bone, he or she becomes a perfect organic hieroglyph in which body and meaning finally meet and become coequal. Language turns physical, while matter takes on linguistic qualities -- the word originates and resonates within the material stuff of bodies. The divine *Logos* no longer determines and conceals meaning, arbitrarily assigning it to signifiers that have no connection to their signifieds and retaining the tyrannical, anarchic right to change those assignations at a moment's (or without) notice. Faith is replaced by perfect knowledge, and thus the threat of "spiritual" dissolution is eliminated. Heresy and orthodoxy, as categories, no longer exist. Further, identity becomes synonymous with being in the present and is no longer a mere performance or imitation of something vague and uncertain yet to come. Stasis is finally achieved, and with it, freedom from spirit and God -- the agents who have robbed men and women of their authentic, physical being. Artaud writes:

> We are not yet born,
> we are not yet of this world,
> there is no world yet,
> things have not been created,
> the *raison d'être* not yet found,
>
> . . . .
>
> Men will tear from themselves the liquid, the viscous, the slack, the cowardly.
> (trans. Rattray, "I hate and renounce as a coward" 226)[8]

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[7] L'homme est malade parce qu'il est mal construit.
Il faut se décider à le mettre à nu pour lui gratter cet animalcule qui le démange mortellement,

dieu,
et avec dieu
ses organes. (*OC* 13: 104)

[8] Nous ne sommes pas encore nés,
nous ne sommes pas encore au monde,
Il n'y a pas encore du monde,

In the medieval Christian's understanding of time and sacred history, a similar stasis -- an elimination of the liquid and fluid, a solidification of the flesh -- awaits the individual in heaven after the Last Judgement. There and then, bodies will no longer be plagued by change; as speaking subjects, they will not be separated from their objects, nor will the words they use be empty of or distinct from authentic meaning. Individual Christians will not be mere allegories of future existence, mere instances of *imitatio Christi*, but will be spirit and truth and even the body of Christ in themselves. Crystallized flesh will not be imprinted with further proofs of God's existence or undergo changes in *status*, and so resurrection and glorification in a way constitute a revolt against God akin to Artaud's adoption of the body of bone. To a certain degree, the body-soul-self becomes independent of God, becomes a "body without organs" "delivered . . . from all [its] automatic reactions and restored . . . to . . . true freedom" (trans. Weaver, "To Have Done" 571).[9] More importantly, it is delivered from its own inconstancy in the face of either God the Father's eternal perfection or of Christ his Son's extended and infecting liminality. Uncertainty appears to be obliterated, anarchy and plague to be abolished, while the tyranny they support in Dollimore's perverse dynamic (and which is just another manifestation of anarchy and plague) seems finally to be over.

For corresponding to this hardening of the body, there will be an immeasurable strengthening of the Law at the end of time and the succession of history. Christ's wounds will heal, leaving the well of anarchic mercy to run dry and allowing justice to become the overriding concern of

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> les choses ne sont pas encore faites,
> la raison d'être n'est pas trouvée
> . . . .
> les hommes arracheront d'eux, le liquide, le visqueux, l'étale, le lâche. ("Je hais et abjecte en lâche," qtd. in Greene *Thought* 154, 156)

[9] "Lorsque vous lui aurez fait un corps sans organes, / alors vous l'aurez délivré de tous ses automatismes et rendu à sa véritable liberté" (*OC* 13: 104).

humanity's final Judgement. At this time, God the Father and Son themselves will be constrained by the daughter and sister they previously thrust aside. Addressing the souls of the damned in the Chester Judgement, Christ warns:

> Rightuouse doome may you not fleene,
> for grace ys put awaye.
> When tyme of grace was endurynge,
> to seeke yt you had no lykinge.
> Therefore must I, for anythinge,
> doe rightuousenes todaye.
>
> And though my sweete mother deare
> and all the sayntes that ever were
> prayed for you right nowe here,
> all yt were to late.
> Noe grace may growe through theire prayere.
> Then rightuousenes had no powere.
> Therefore, goe to the fyre in feere.
> There gaynes noe other grace. (24.607-20)

Lumiansky and Mills note that Christ here appears to be "constrained -- even perhaps against his merciful instinct (*therefore must I for anythinge* 611) -- to act justly rather than mercifully" (2: 374, ll. 609-18n). His omnipotence is reigned in at the very last by Justice. He cannot do as he pleases, cannot act in opposition to the law as is the sadist's and the tyrant's prerogative and obligation, nor can he undermine Justice by creating a new contract, as he, as masochist, has previously done. Christ and the Godhead must judge according to the strictest letter of the law, and therefore themselves finally become its subjects.

The human desire for certainty that this fantasized subjection of God the tyrant and / or Christ the anarchist evinces is entirely understandable. Living in a fleshly body always only half finished and completely debased in the "knowledge" of its whole spirit other, men and women win a sort of victory in their physical resurrection and purification, in their movement from the organic to the metallic or crystalline. They also win a battle against the unpredictable and untrustworthy united or divided Trinity. Once "truth" is at last made manifest and becomes completely accessible to each and every reader, the tyrant can no longer appeal to a reality that both antedates and postdates creation as justification for radical changes in meaning; the individual believer can thus no longer be "caught out" as the terrible ambiguity between orthodoxy and heresy is resolved. Finally, with the sealing of Christ's incontinent, plague-ridden, abject body, the believer need no longer worry about being expelled from the corpus Christi as an object, need no longer wonder what the conditions of mercy and salvation might be, and whether or not such anarchic concepts might operate by some strange logic or law. Everything will be understood without God's intercession: without his selective, reluctant and incomplete revelations and explanations. The law God currently appeals to in order to justify his own power becomes accessible to human consumers, eliminating the need for God as middle-man. Humankind deals directly with what has for so long been kept in the shadows, or in the looking glass of 1 Corinthians 13.12. "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face," Paul promises. "Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, *even as I have been fully known*."

Artaud reminds us in his letter to Breton that it is our desire for certainty that in part gives rise to the eternal law. He writes: "we too . . . have made the Law and . . . are, whether we like it or not, the custodians and accomplices of the Law" (trans. Weaver 406).[10] Humankind is implicated in the establishment of final "justice" but is not identified as its sole originator or "revolutionary" proponent ("*we too* have made the Law"); for this reason, any promise of future perfection must still be considered inherently suspect. Artaud himself determined to purify and harden his body on earth and in the present,[11] understanding that assurances of future certainty could perhaps be employed by an unscrupulous spiritual demiurge to encourage humanity's uncomplaining and compliant suffering of incompletion and uncertainty here on earth. He also raised the question of just what exactly this final law or justice constitutes. Is it simply the passive aspect of the active Trinity, interceding on its own behalf, feeding off the inconstancy of humankind and the flesh to justify its eventual, incontestable, despotic supremacy? Or is it yet another in a potentially infinite series of tyrants and therefore plagues, this time feeding off the inconstancy of the anarchic Trinity itself, promising humankind and the flesh deliverance from its deliverers? Could the Law, could Justice, then be the double of Mercy?

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[10] "c'est Nous, aussi, qui avons fait la Loi et sommes que nous le veuillons ou non les responsables et les complices de la Loi" (*OC* 7: 288).

[11] "I will be saved, *me, here*, and not in the other world, and it is me, a man, who will be saved and not Christ or God" ("je serai sauvé, *moi, ici*, et non dans l'autre monde et c'est moi, homme, qui serai sauvé et non le Christ ou Dieu," *OC* 15: 52).

It is not surprising to note that resurrected and glorified human flesh does not quite constitute a perfect body without organs. Although it is true that the crystalline body can and need not be marked with further proofs of God's existence, proofs have already been indelibly stamped all over its unchanging surface. Medieval theologians were in general agreement that resurrected bodies would retain certain individual characteristics in heaven: their sex, for example, as well as differences in stature and shape (Bynum, *Resurrection* 265). Most significantly, following Augustine, they agreed that martyrs would retain their scars as a crown of glory (Bynum 98, 266, n. 144), and that other saints and more ordinary believers would be distinguished one from the other by immediately identifiable traits. Thus Augustine writes in the *Sermones*:

> Preserve your state, and God will preserve your honour for you. The resurrection of the dead is compared to the stars placed in the sky. *Star differs from star in glory*, the Apostle says; *even so with the resurrection of the dead*. For virginity will shine differently there, as will chastity in marriage, as will holy widowhood. They will shine in diverse manner, but all will be there. Differing splendours, common heaven.[12]

These marks, although and perversely because they are unchanging, forever substantiate the existence of a still-disembodied God. Wounds, whether inflicted in the course of actual or ascetic martyrdom, and even if stylized and no longer bleeding, give eternal witness to the pains that each individual was willing (or required) to suffer for his or her beliefs. The greater the pain, the stronger the faith, the more convincing the argument for God's existence, and the larger the reward: in this way visible difference forms the basis of a hierarchy itself incapable of change.

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[12] Servate gradus vestros: servat enim vobis Deus honores vestros. Comparata est resurrectio mortuorum stellis in coelo constitutis. *Stella enim ab stella differt in gloria*, ut Apostolus dicit: *sic et resurrectio mortuorum* [I Cor. 15. 41-42)]. Aliter enim ibi lucebit virginitas, aliter ibi lucebit castitas conjugalis, aliter ibi lucebit sancta viduitas. Diversa lucebunt: sed omnes ibi erunt. Splendor dispar, coelum commune. (qtd. in Bynum *Resurrection* 100, n. 153; sermon 132, ch. 3, par. 3)

In a sense, plague or liminality is rendered static and yet preserved in the post-resurrection body; the individual both takes on the body without organs and retains its forever-fleshly nemesis, becomes spiritual and yet remains literal, is simultaneously allegory and truth. Tyranny must, even at the end of time and with the establishment of the final regime, continue to justify itself through the threat of plague, whether remembered or *au courant*. Bodies in heaven are merely inscribed with records of past anarchy and change, while bodies in hell experience that change -- through dismemberment, digestion, and thus abjection -- for all eternity. The standard representation of hell from the twelfth century through the high Middle Ages was "as a mouth that swallows the damned" (Bynum, *Resurrection* 307); once in the bowels of hell, the body was repeatedly dissected and reconstructed, forced to ingest or be ingested, to regurgitate or be regurgitated:

> Turchill sees several types of sinners -- soldiers, priests, proud men -- whose limbs are cut off and fried before they are reassembled for further torture -- as well as thieves and cheats who are forced to eat and vomit up burning money. Mechtild of Magdeburg sees Satan as one who 'makes himself of great size' and 'swallows' devils, Jews, and heathen into his 'paunch' 'body and soul,' 'eating' Sodomites and 'gnawing' the greedy . . . . In the 'Visions of Tondal' . . . Tondal . . . sees the greedy eaten by a huge beast, murderers and persistent sinners 'cooked and recooked' in skillets or cauldrons until they are liquid, gluttons and fornicators forced into a mountain 'like an oven where bread is baked,' their genitals chewed by worms that gush from within. Other fornicators (both male and female) are digested in the stomach of a monster, then vomited or defecated forth pregnant with vipers. These vipers, devouring the entrails within, then pecking their way out all over the body with razor-sharp beaks, are hooked into the flesh from which they are 'born' and double back upon it, consuming it 'down to the nerves and bone.' In the deepest part of hell, Satan squeezes souls with dozens of hands, then inhales, devours, and exhales them forever, so that for all their suffering they can never achieve the release that would come from annihilation. (292-94)

Such horrific abjection, such complete violation of boundaries, does not only constitute the worst of punishments and does not simply maintain the sinner in a state of eternal incompletion.

Aquinas, quoting Saint Gregory, acknowledges that the wicked "are punished for their own wickedness," yet agrees with the Church Father that "they will burn to some [additional] purpose":

> namely that the just may all both see in God the joys they receive, and perceive in them the torments they have escaped: for which reason they will acknowledge themselves for ever the debtors of Divine grace, the more that they will see how the evils which they overcame by its assistance are punished eternally. (3009; suppl. q. 99, art. 1)

Everlasting punishment is a condition of everlasting reward, for "if the unhappiness of the wicked angels comes at length to an end, the happiness of the good will also come to an end, which is inadmissible" (3010; suppl. q. 99, art. 2). Plague must continue for perfection to be achieved -- yet this perfection is not that of the self-contained, whole and unchanging heavenly elect who, after all, remain fundamentally incomplete, indebted to (if no longer at the whim of) heavenly grace. This perfection is instead that of the tyrant (or plague) and of his (its) final regime or *status*, which may not be brought to an end or superseded. It is the perfection of God, or alternately of the tyrant / plague that controls gods, "Justice," or the law.

It is then impossible to escape Artaud's doubles of tyranny and anarchy (and therefore Jonathan Dollimore's perverse dynamic) both within and without the linear progression of time. Individuals and societies cannot invoke the one without its other, cannot admit the one and exclude its double -- not just because they are each other's inverse, but because they are one and the same. Plague and tyranny manifest themselves repeatedly and for all eternity. To imagine an end to the cycle is to accept and to participate in the myth of the law and of the spirit, as perhaps Artaud himself did at the end of his life. Aspiring to return to "The time man was a tree without organs or function / but possessed of will" (trans. Weaver, "Letter to Pierre Loeb" 515),[13] Artaud betrayed his final, desperate desire to escape the theatre of cruelty he described in his writings and experienced first-hand throughout his life. In "Theater and Science," he fantasizes that a mere act of will might deliver him and others from the "invented state" of physical death:

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[13] "Le temps où l'homme était un arbre sans organes ni fonction / mais de volonté . . . ." See Charbonnier's *Essai sur Antonin Artaud* for a reprint of the entire letter, 202-206.

> The human body dies only because we have forgotten how to transform it and change it.
> Beyond that it does not die, it does not fall into dust, it does not pass through the tomb
> . . . . No, the human body is imperishable and immortal and it changes,
> it changes physically and materially
> anatomically and manifestly,
> it changes visibly and on the spot, provided you are really willing to take the material trouble to make it change. (trans. Moore 169-70)[14]

According to Stephen Barber, in the last few weeks before his death, Artaud made frantic attempts "to strengthen his failing body with a battered and scarred carapace of language" (159). His revolt against death and the spirit was unsuccessful, however, and he died on 4 March 1948. Artaud's death confirmed his previous, repeated declarations that all metaphysical rebellions must eventually fail. It also confirmed what was implied in those declarations, descriptions, even allegorical representations of fruitless human revolt -- that action in the face of inevitable failure ennobles; that insurrection undertaken in the knowledge that it is futile dignifies and exalts.

That Artaud denied the implications of his own theories at the end of his life does not in any way lessen the impact his message holds for the current age, which fancies itself liberal and democratic, and believes it has abandoned the body as a source of knowledge and medium of communication. However, as in the Middle Ages, circumstances beyond our control remind us that this is simply not so. We continue to live in an age of anarchy and tyranny, and our human flesh remains the centre of all of our experiences and perceptions -- as playwrights, performance artists, and critics have encouraged us to remember over the past twenty years.

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[14] Le corps humain ne meurt que parce qu'on a oublié de le transformer et de le changer.
Hors cela il ne meurt pas, il ne tombe pas en poussière, il ne passe pas par le tombeau
. . . . Non, le corps humain est impérissable et immortel et il change,
il change physiquement et matériellement,
anatomiquement et manifestement,
il change visiblement et sur place pourvu qu'on veuille bien se donner la peine matérielle de le faire changer. ("Le Théâtre et la Science," in Virmaux 264-265)

Yet their message was largely ignored until 1982, when the extent of GRID or AIDS infection rates in the San Francisco gay community first became apparent and the body, as a result, began to regain some of its former importance. The impending realization of Artaud's warning from *Theater and its Double* -- that "the sky can still fall on our heads" -- was heralded by University of California researcher Andrew Moss, who, having projected a worst-case scenario for transmission rates of the disease, witnessed his grim predictions coming true. "The sky is falling, we know it," Moss exclaimed; "You tell them [the government, the public] it's falling, but nobody listens" (Garrett 301).

By 1987, people and governments had not only started to listen, they had started to react. Researchers on staff at the Global Programme on AIDS made a world-wide study of "all the legal and political activities" surrounding the disease and disappointedly noted what seemed to be "many of the same social responses that had followed the arrival of the plague in fourteenth-century Europe" (472). Laurie Garrett writes:

> First, with the initial emergence of the microbe -- plague, bacteria or HIV -- came denial in all tiers of society. The tendency was to ignore the microbial threat, or assume only 'they' -- some distinct subpopulation of society -- were at risk . . . . The second social epidemic was fear. Some event in the biological epidemic would suddenly shock a society out of its state of denial, propelling people into a state of group terror . . . . Eventually . . . the social epidemic of fear usually yielded to a wake of repression. Fear-driven government response was usually irrational, prompting attacks on the victims of disease rather than the microbes. (472-73)

In the Middle Ages, Jews were slaughtered throughout Europe in response to outbreaks of the bubonic plague (473). In the eighteenth century, Saint-Rémys turned away the diseased ship *Grand-Saint-Antoine* in a tyrannical act which, Artaud tells us, trespassed "not only upon the rights of man but upon the simplest respect for human life and upon all sorts of national or international conventions . . ." (*TD* 16).[15] In the "enlightened" twentieth century, in response to the threat posed by HIV, countries all over the world passed repressive legislation in open violation "of international legal pacts to which the offending nations had previously agreed" (Garrett 476). The president of the German Federal Court of Justice in November of 1987 suggested that "it might soon prove necessary to tattoo and quarantine people who were infected with the virus" -- as Nazi Germany had done with the Jews and other "undesirables" during World War II (Garrett 466). The Cuban government carried out just such a program -- by January of 1988, it had placed 174 people under lifetime house arrest (467). During the course of 1987, "more than 350 items of AIDS-related legislation were debated by politicians in U.S. states, most of them aimed at restricting the activities of HIV-positive individuals or at mandating testing of various population groups" (469). The U.S. Senate "voted unanimously -- 96 to 0 -- to mandate HIV tests for all applicants for legal immigration to the United States" (471). And in that same week, "governors of three states -- Minnesota, Texas, and Colorado -- signed laws permitting the local authorities to quarantine indefinitely HIV-positive individuals who seemed by virtue of their sexual activities to pose a threat to society" (471-72).

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[15] "passant pour cela non seulement sur le droit des gens, mais sur le plus simple respect de la vie humaine, et sur toutes sortes de conventions nationales ou internationales . . ." (23).

In each of the above cases, the anarchy and abjection presented by the individual or social body infected by plague brings to a head the tyranny and hypocrisy latent in human society. This is especially true and is especially necessary in the current, allegedly "democratic" age in which an iron-fisted, intolerant "Moral Majority" rules. Yet plague never succeeds in dissolving tyranny, nor does tyranny succeed in affecting the spread of disease. Repressive measures simply force epidemics underground and guarantee their spread (Garrett 464); conversely, plague and the morbid frivolity it often inspires simply encourages those same repressive measures to be more aggressively enforced.[16] As Artaud reminds us, "In the theater as in the plague there is something both victorious and vengeful . . ." (*TD* 27), both revolutionary and reactionary. It is to the individual's benefit to recognize both of these aspects of theatre as spiritual and plague as physical disease. However, neither aspect can itself become victorious -- like the actor, they are together confined to a perfect circle, and their fury "negates itself to just the degree it frees itself and dissolves into universality" (25).

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[16] Laurie Garrett discusses the understandable, yet paradoxical behaviour engaged in by certain individuals within the gay community at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, and describes the conservative response to (or exploitation of) that behaviour which immediately followed. She relates the events leading up to and surrounding Gay Freedom Day (27 June) 1983:

In his article, "The Surpassing Body," Herbert Blau attempts to weigh the ideological "benefits" of the current AIDS epidemic against the human "losses" incurred over the course of the disease. He writes:

> Some of us were smitten a generation ago by the corporeal license of an imaginary pestilence, 'as much moral as social,' that provided us with a paradigm for the theatre whose purpose would be 'to drain abscesses collectively.' But we are likely to have very mixed feelings today about the confirming evidence of 'a superior disease,' dark and insidious, but 'infallibly identified with sexual freedom which is also dark, although we do not know precisely why.' From 'the human point of view,' as Artaud wrote in his notorious essay on the plague, the essence of theatre may still be, like the plague, to impel

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'It's sort of depressing,' an exhausted Silverman [the San Francisco Public Health Director] said just days before the Gay Pride Parade and Stonewall remembrance brought over 300,000 celebrants to San Francisco. 'You have individuals who are filled with anxiety about AIDS. And because of that anxiety they are going to the bathhouses and indulging in high-risk sex to relieve that stress. It's very, very paradoxical.'

Bathhouse owner Hal Slate, proprietor of the Cauldron, corroborated Silverman's observation. 'So we're caught in a Catch-22 where we're now dealing with an extraordinary level of stress and anxiety and confrontation with death, all of it surrounding the very mechanism that we see as there for us to help us deal with our anxiety and stress,' Slate said . . . .

The Gay Freedom Day celebrations took place in New York and San Francisco, and the bathhouses remained open . . . . Warning signs were posted in gay establishments, bowls of free condoms were placed in gay bars and hotels, Health Department pamphlets were distributed advising men to practice safe sex, and the world witnessed it all on international television. Elegant drag queens . . . and a host of other photogenic gay contingents filled television screens as somber announcers remarked on the odd juxtaposition of such frivolity with an epidemic.

The television coverage ignited backlash. The Reverend Billy Graham cried out that 'AIDS is a judgment of God.' Television evangelist and leader of the Moral Majority Jerry Falwell denounced 'perverted lifestyles,' saying in a nationally televised sermon, 'If the Reagan administration does not put its full weight against this, what is now a gay plague in this country, I feel that a year from now, President Ronald Reagan personally will be blamed for allowing this awful disease to break out among the innocent American public.

'AIDS is God's punishment,' Falwell concluded. 'The scripture is clear: We do reap it in our flesh when we violate the laws of God.' (329-330)

> us to see things as they are, causing 'the mask to fall,' revealing 'the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world' . . . . So it is with the current epidemic, though the ideological benefits may not be, from the human point of view, sufficient to offset the ravaged bodies. (86-87)

Blau presumes that Artaud considered plague and tyranny separate, opposed forces, and mistakenly assumes that he was concerned with social ideology. Further, he implies that Artaud advocates the initiation of a plague / tyranny cycle and therefore the institution of a theatre of cruelty that does not already exist and would not exist without humankind's perverse desire and direct intervention. Modern society, Blau suggests, has tested Artaud's theories and found them to be too harsh. Some other method of social revolution -- some manner of deconstruction and dissolution that is more controllable -- must be found and employed instead.

Artaud's discussion of tyranny and plague is, of course, not so much a prescription as a description of a cycle which already exists and will continue to do so. The individual is simply encouraged to be aware of the state of cruelty -- of plague and / or of tyranny -- in which he or she lives, for recognition is the only authentic response possible in the face of circular revolution. The plague and its double provide no ideological benefits to the individual or to society, and they carry a high human toll. Yet the epidemic must be experienced and openly acknowledged, at least so long as men and women are made of flesh and blood, and not of crystal or bone.

This is effectively dramatized in the biblical "cycles" and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, where Christ the tyrant bleeds to prove his "fleshliness," his humanity. Christ's blood renders visible the incompletion of the flesh and thus the vulnerability of the subject that is wounded; however, it also demonstrates the omnipotence and anger of the spirit that wounds. From the Crucifixion to the Day of Judgement, Christ turns his absolute power and anger against himself and against his own flesh, suffers with humanity, and therefore acts as its mirror. For this reason, the sight of his many wounds is terrible, as *4 Malus* testifies in Towneley:

> To se his woundys bledande,
> This is a dulfull case;

Alas, how shall I stand
Or loke hym in the face? (30.75-78)

More terrible still, however, is the prospect that Christ's power to wound will be directed outward at the end of time. In the same play, *I Demon* expresses his reluctance to appear before Christ and to see him face to face:

I had leuer go to Rome
Yet thryse on my fete
Then for to grefe yonde grome
Or with hym for to mete. (187-90)

He explains:

For wysely
He spekys on trete [at length],
His paustee is grete,
Bot begyn he to threte
He lokys full grisly. (191-95)

The word "grisly" could have at least two meanings here. The dominant reading is "fierce" or "cruel," and so the first demon describes Christ as a dreadful judge or brutal tyrant. However, the word could also mean "ghastly" or "gruesome," and so evokes the image of Christ's body itself tyrannized, abject, liminal, and suffering.

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